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The laughter of God and

THE LAUGHTER OF GOD

By
David James Burrell, D. D.

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THE LAUGHTER OF GOD

AND OTHER SERMONS

(Expository)

BY

DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D.D.

Pastor of the Marble Collegiate Church, New York



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If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever.

I

THE LAUGHTER OF GOD

“Why do the heathen rage,
And the people imagine a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,
‘Let us break their bands asunder,
And cast away their cords from us!’
He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.”

PSALM 2.

I HAVE heard the Bible spoken of as “a back number”; but only gross ignorance or crass prejudice could so characterize it. Read for yourself and see.

It is the oldest of books; but it was adjusted in the beginning by its divine Author to all the vicissitudes of succeeding ages.

A back number indeed! Tell me, then; Why should it be the best seller in the book-markets of the world to-day?

The second Psalm is offered in evidence. It was written three thousand years ago; nevertheless it is so distinctly up-to-date that it sounds as if it has been composed “somewhere in Flanders,” within sound of the heavy guns on the firing line.

It contains four stanzas of three verses each; and in them we shall find an answer to four great questions which are disturbing the hearts of the people just now.

In the first stanza we have an answer to the question,

“WHO BEGAN THIS WAR?”

The kings and rulers of the earth are represented as sitting in council to devise schemes for thwarting the beneficent plans of the Father and his anointed Son.

But kings and their counsellors are not alone to blame. Behold the mob! The heathen are raging and the people imagining a vain thing. Hear them shouting “*Let us break his bands asunder and cast away his cords from us!*”

What bands? The bands of law and order and humanity and righteousness. Whose cords? The restraining cords of the Lord and his Anointed.

Thus rulers and people clasp hands in an effort to cast off salutary restraint and revel in lawless freedom. This is the world’s war—All hands to the firing line! It is a mad, reckless, tumultuous revolt against God.

In the second stanza we have an answer to the question,

“WHAT WAS THE OCCASION OF THE WAR?”

They say it was provoked by the assassination of a prince in Vienna three years ago. That, however, was a mere pretext, a convenient pretext for the kindling of fagots which ambitious despots had for decades been heaping up.

The plans were long maturing: as to some treaties which were to be kept and others to be broken; as to the pathways of armies advancing to conquest in many

lands and over the seven seas. Then came the fulness of time. An assassin's dagger pointed along the dial; but God struck the hour. The despots wanted war; and he said, "They shall have it!" Thus the lightnings, once loosed, passed into mightier hands.

Listen! A burst of laughter out of heaven! Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a nation soweth that shall it also reap. The mob that sowed the dragons' teeth shall cry for peace; but behold, the Reaper is abroad in the world and it will be for him to say when they shall have it. Alas, for those who run upon the bosses of the shield of God!

But is there wrath in him?

Why not? God's name is love, but let it not be forgotten that he has another name, to wit, "a consuming fire." Who would respect a man incapable of anger when occasion calls for it? A God with no room in his nature for holy indignation—a God who could look on bloodstained seas and desolated homes without the making bare of his mighty arm—would not be a respectable God.

Hence this burst of laughter. He is angry; wherefore the war goes on. In vain do pacifists conspire and Vaticans plead for peace. An indignant God is in the field, and the chastening must continue until the blasphemous schemes of the God-haters are brought low.

Meanwhile he laughs at the fatuity of his enemies as at a swarm of gnats that conspire against a cyclone, or a nest of blind adders that spit out their venom against the sun, or a convocation of earth-worms that presume to lift up their crowned heads against the king's chariot on his highway.

And he "speaks unto them in his wrath." Observe what he says: "*Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.*"

There is a world of significance in that little "yet." It means, "Despite your plotting and your frightfulness and your disregard of all laws human and divine, my Anointed shall sit supreme among the nations and his Golden Rule shall yet bring in the Golden Age. Your heavy battalions, your airships and dreadnaughts and submarines shall not prevail against him."

Moreover he "vexes them in his sore-displeasure." Let us not mistake the significance of current events. When God is sore displeased it behooves the people to stop, look and listen.

There was a time in the history of France when the Corps Legislatif passed a solemn resolution "That there is no God." That word passed out of the Assembly and was caught up by the multitudes who swept through the streets crying "There is no God!" A courtesan was brought in a triumphal chariot to Notre Dame and enthroned at the high altar as Goddess of Reason. That night "The Terror" began: and the gutters of Paris ran red with blood. The seed-sowing of the wind was reaped in a whirlwind of death. The people courted "vexation," and they had it.

In the third stanza we have an answer to the question,

"WHY DO THEY KEEP ON FIGHTING?"

And the answer is, because they cannot help it. The nations have in fact given up their dreams of con-

quest. Ahab no longer covets the Belgian vineyard. But repentance comes too late. There is another King now on the premises, and the belligerents must reckon with him.

The Heir-apparent, that is, the Anointed, now appears and presents his credentials: "*I will declare the decree,*" he says; and he proceeds, as it were, to unfold the parchment on which is written, signed and sealed with Jehovah's signet, "*Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*"

It thus appears that Christ the Anointed is the only begotten and therefore co-equal Son of God.

All men are God's sons by creation, and many are his sons by adoption; but he has only one begotten Son, to whom belong the kingdoms of this world by right of lineal descent and primogeniture. He is fore-ordained to be King of kings and Lord of lords. The government is upon his shoulder. Thus it is decreed and thus it must be.

The day when this title was definitely assured to him was the day when he rose triumphant from the dead. By this he was "declared to be the Son of God with power."

All doubt as to this most wonderful and singular birth-day is removed by Paul's words in the synagogue at Antioch: "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.'"

In the paschal cup we drink to "*The Day,*" as a foregleam of the coming day of his coronation when

all kings shall prostrate themselves and every knee shall bow before him.

And with the Decree goes a great promise; "*Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thy inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*"

Has Christ ever asked this? Come to Calvary and see. Was ever such a prayer offered since the foundation of the world as when he, lifted up betwixt heaven and earth to die for us men and our salvation, stretched out his hands in divine appeal for the heathen and the uttermost parts of the earth to be given him as the fruit of the travail of his soul?

In the fourth stanza we have an answer to the question,

"WHEN WILL THIS WAR END?"

It will end when the nations have learned the lesson which God is trying to teach them and not before. Certain it is that they have not learned it yet. National pride must be brought low. Dreams of conquest must be dissipated into thin air. Christ and his Gospel of peace must be acknowledged as supreme over all.

The time will come when, like Julian the Apostate, the arrogant provokers of strife shall clutch the earth and cry, "Galilean, thou hast conquered!" Then shall the end be. Meanwhile they are like rebellious boys kept after school to con their unlearned lesson. To them the Lord speaks; "*Be wise, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth.*"

They will never yield until they are broken: never until defeat and gaunt hunger and empty exchequers and the draining of martial resources shall have brought them to their knees. This is involved in the divine plan; as it is written, "*Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them to pieces as a potter's vessel.*"

If this world is ever to be Christ's it is obvious that some things must go. The pride of power and the lust of conquest must go. Militarism must go. And they are going, going at the pace that kills!

The freedom of the world is being purchased with a great price; but, when the sun rises upon a chastened and regenerated race—ready for the coming of peace—we shall see that the awful price was not too great to pay for it.

Wherefore let kings and rulers and all who long for brighter days "*serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.*"

The divine purposes are ripening fast. Day by day it becomes more evident that God is making the wrath of men to praise him. He is a great God; and we, whose breath is in our nostrils, cannot afford to be at odds with him.

If it be not so with you, "*kiss the Son lest he be angry and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little.*" To kiss the prince, in ancient times, was a token of fealty. Thus do we pass under the yoke of Christ; submitting to his cords of truth and his bonds of righteousness as our reasonable service.

If we care for an echo of this up-to-date Psalm we shall find it in the Battle Hymn of the Republic:

"I have read a fiery Gospel writ in burnished rows of steel;
As ye deal with my contemners so with you my grace shall
deal;

Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his
heel,

Since God is marching on.

"He has sounded forth a trumpet that shall never call re-
treat;

He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment
seat;

O be swift, my soul, to answer him! Be jubilant, my feet;
Our God is marching on."

It is fitting that a portion of Scripture so full of the divine majesty—like a sky with alternating suns and storms—should close with a benediction; "*Blessed are all they that put their trust in him!*" This is our supreme need, a more implicit trust in him.

The passing days call for great believers. Little-Faith, who worships a little god, is inevitably at his wits' end. The God in whom we trust is a great God! Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. But ever "behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face."

Let us rest assured that out of this world's war will emerge a better world to live in.

If Christ were not strong enough to crush the serpent with his heel, he would not be able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto him. Our God is the God of salvation. He is our refuge and our strength; therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed and the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea.

We are living in momentous times. These are the times Isaiah foresaw when he wrote, "Who is this that cometh from Bozrah, glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?—I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save—Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?—I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me. The day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come."

These are the times of which John dreamed in Patmos; "I saw heaven opened, and beheld a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True. His eyes were as a flame of fire; on his head were many crowns, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. Out of his mouth goeth a sharp two-edged sword, with which he doth smite the nations. He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath upon his vesture and upon his thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

"In an age on ages telling, to be living is sublime."

The King is on his triumphant march to the throne. He comes amid the roar and tempest of Armageddon to tread the red dragon under his feet and assume his own dominion from the river unto the ends of the earth.

Fall in with the logic of events, O people of Christ! Hosanna in the highest! Welcome the righteous and eternal peace! Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and let the King of glory enter in!

II

THE VOICE IN THE STORM

"Give unto the Lord, O ye sons of the mighty,
Give unto the Lord glory and strength.
Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name;
Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.
The voice of the Lord is upon the waters!

The God of glory thundereth,
Even the Lord upon many waters.
The voice of the Lord is powerful;
The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars;
Yea, the Lord breaketh in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
He maketh them also to skip like a calf;
Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild-ox.

The voice of the Lord cleaveth the flames of fire.
The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness;
The Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.
The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve,
And strippeth the forests bare:
And in his temple everything saith, Glory!

The Lord sat as king at the Flood;
Yea, the Lord sitteth as king for ever.
The Lord will give strength unto his people;
The Lord will bless his people with peace."

PSALM 29.

"**T**HERE are no songs like the songs of Zion."
So said John Milton, himself the sweetest
of uninspired poets; and all reverent stu-
dents of the Scriptures agree with him.

We have here one of the most sublime of these songs of Zion. Its title is "The Voice in the Storm."

It begins with a *Gloria* and ends with a *Pax Vobiscum*. It is divided into three strophes.

In the first the storm is represented as gathering in the North. The clouds assemble over Mount Hermon; there are ominous mutterings as before a battle.

In the second the gale comes sweeping toward the South. The sky is rent with vivid lightnings and reverberates with peals of thunder. The flood-gates are open; the cedars of the forest are crashing; the mountains are trembling.

In the third, the storm moves over the Wilderness of Kadesh with lessening violence and dies away in silence toward the Great Sea.

It is a wonderful Psalm; and should be read, as Spurgeon says, "beneath the black wing of the tempest; its verses marching to the tune of thunderbolts." God is everywhere conspicuous. The earth is hushed by the majesty of his presence. There are voices on every hand; but his voice is over all.

We have here the inspired conception of Nature as a temple in which "everything saith, Glory!" that is, everything in heaven above and earth beneath does homage to the Creator and Sovereign, crying, "Glory to God!"

The ascription of a voice to Nature is distinctly poetic. In fact nature has no voice: she gives forth only inarticulate sounds. Yet Bryant rightly says,

"To him who, in the love of Nature, holds
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
A various language."

18 THE VOICE IN THE STORM

In like manner David sings in a spirit of rapt adoration,

“The heavens declare the glory of God,
And the firmament showeth his handiwork:
Day unto day uttereth speech,
And night unto night showeth knowledge.”

This thought is amplified by Addison in his mystic hymn:

“The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue, ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Their great Original proclaim.
The unwearied sun, from day to day,
Does his Creator's powers display,
And publishes to every land
The work of an almighty hand.

“Soon as the evening shades prevail
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the listening earth
Repeats the story of her birth;
Whilst all the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they roll,
And spread the truth from pole to pole.

“What though in solemn silence all
Move round the dark terrestrial ball?
What though no real voice nor sound
Amidst their radiant orbs be found?
In reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice,
Forever singing as they shine,
'The Hand that made us is divine!'"

In like manner the poet Coleridge, in his "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni," invokes all Nature to awake and utter praise:

"Ye ice falls, ye that from the mountain's brow
Adown enormous ravines slope amain;
Motionless torrents, silent cataracts!
Who made you glorious as the gates of heaven
Beneath the keen full moon? Who bade the sun
Clothe you with rainbows? Who, with living flowers
Of loveliest blue, spread garlands at your feet?
God! Let the torrents like a shout of nations
Answer; and let the ice plains echo, God!
God! Sing ye meadow streams with gladsome voice!
Ye pine groves, with your soft and soul-like sounds!
And they, too, have a voice, yon piles of snow,
And in their perilous fall shall thunder God!"

It is important, however, that we should distinguish between the voice of nature and the Voice which is beyond nature and above it. In these days there is a tendency to identify God with his creation, which is simple pantheism, and pantheism is only another name for atheism. To say that "God is everything" is practically to say that God is nothing. To identify him with creation is to affirm that the elements sweep by like a godless rabble on their automatic way. This is not so. "He sitteth above the waters!" His Voice is over them all.

In one of John Calvin's sermons he says, "If any one who wished to know a man should take no notice of his face but fix his eyes only on the points of his nails, his folly would justly be derided; but far greater is the folly of those philosophers who out of mediate and proximate causes weave for themselves

veils, lest they should be compelled to acknowledge the hand which manifestly displays itself in the works of God."

In the early life of St. Augustine, led away by his study of the Greek philosophies, he became a pantheist. But he was unhappy because his soul was at sea. At length, unable to escape from the memory of his mother's prayers and finding no comfort in his vain wanderings, he was driven to his knees. In his "Confessions" he tells the story thus: "In my search for God I asked the earth, and it said 'I am not he.' I asked the sun and the depths, and they answered 'We are not God: look above and beyond us!' I asked the winds and the tempests, and they replied 'No! Anexamenes is wrong; there is something deeper yet!' I asked the stars of heaven and they, too, said 'We are not your God.' I addressed all the living things that surround the doors of my fleshly senses, 'Ye have said that ye are not God; tell me somewhat about him'; and with a great voice they answered, with one accord, 'He made us!'"

The distinction we are making between God and nature, or between the voice of the tempest and the Voice that speaks through it, is important by reason of certain inferences which flow from it.

The first of these inferences is Providence. It clears the atmosphere to realize that the world we are living in is not a fortuitous concourse of atoms, an organism without an organizer, but that One sitteth enthroned, as Law-giver and Executive, sustaining and controlling all.

God rules in the physical world. The stars of heaven sweep round in their orbits obedient to his

will. He rules in infinities and infinitesimals alike. He directs the wandering of the minutest vagrant of earth and sea. "Who provideth for the raven his food? When his young ones wander for lack of meat, they cry unto God."

He rules in history. The wars of nations are not beyond his ken; he maketh their wrath to praise him. It is impossible to read history aright except as one is able to read Providence between the lines. "Come, Philip," said Luther to his friend Melancthon in the darkest days of the Reformation, "come, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea!"

He rules in the experience of individual men. If he is not unmindful of the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air, how much more shall he care for you, O ye of little faith?" A blessed *a fortiori* that! "How much more shall he care for you!" The voice in the storm is, therefore, a voice of comfort and strength.

"The Lord our God is clothed with might;
The winds obey his will.
He speaks and, in his heavenly height,
The rolling sun stands still.
Rebel, ye waves, and o'er the land
With threatening aspect roar;
The Lord uplifts his awful hand
And chains you to the shore!
Howl winds of night, your force combine;
Without his high behest,
Ye shall not, in the mountain pine,
Disturb the sparrow's nest.

His voice sublime is heard afar;
In distant peals it dies;
He yokes the whirlwind to his car,
And sweeps the howling skies!
Ye nations, bend; in reverence bend!
Ye monarchs, wait his nod;
And bid the choral song ascend
To celebrate our God!"

A second inference which follows from the contemplation of the Voice above the Storm is *the doctrine of Grace*.

If it be true that there is a God who controls the elements; and if it be further true that this God is our Father; then it follows inevitably that he would not suffer his sinful and suffering children to abide without hope. He would not leave us adrift, on a rudderless raft, upon a boundless sea. Is there no eye to pity, no arm to save? Is there no relief from "this certain fearful looking for Judgment"? Is there no remedy for sin?

The Voice in the storm proclaims him the Mighty to save. He will make bare his arm in our behalf. He does make bare his arm! Behold it on Calvary! The arm of the Lord is there made bare, as when a workman rolls back his sleeve to address himself to a mighty task. The Lord thus stretches forth his omnipotent hand to deliver us.

So the voice of Revelation answers to the Voice in the storm. The New Testament answers to the Old. The Gospel responds to prophecy: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Yes, the Voice of the Lord is upon the waters; and behold, he comes this way. He walks upon the boisterous sea! He has seen us toiling hopelessly at the oars. Alas, that any should fail to recognize him. See John and Peter and Andrew, looking into each other's faces fearfully and whispering, "It is a spectre!" He speaks: his voice is the same that David heard above the thunders of Kadesh; the same that Job heard out of the whirlwind, the same that came to Daniel when the four winds of heaven strove upon the Great Sea; "Be not afraid; it is I!"

Wherefore let all who worship in his temple say "Glory!" Let them rejoice, because this God is the God of salvation.

Open your ears, O men and women toiling at the futile oars of self-reliance and despairing of help! He speaks; and his benediction is "Peace be unto you." See that ye be not as those who, when he spake through the open heavens, said, "Behold it thundereth!" The sounds of nature are inarticulate; but the Voice of nature's God is eloquent of hope and pardon and eternal life.

And here is the joy of living. To him who can distinguish between the sound of thunder and the voice of the God that thundereth, life is no longer a vain battling against infinite odds. The Almighty has come into his philosophy; and he finds himself not a mere creature of circumstance, but a beloved and cared-for child of God.

So ends the storm. There is a great calm; and the Voice that was heard through the warring elements now speaks in the silence of the trysting place.

It is recorded of Elijah that, when his soul was

weary amid the troubles that befell him in the evil reign of Ahab, "he went a day's journey into the wilderness and sat down under a juniper tree." There the weariness of life overcame him: so that he cried "It is enough; O Lord, take me!" Then he betook himself to a cave; where he still lamented, "I have been very jealous for thee, O Lord: and they have slain thy prophets and I only am left. Be pleased to take me!" He went forth and stood before the cave; and behold, the Lord passed by and a mighty wind arose and rent the mountains; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind there came an earthquake, so that the ground rocked beneath his feet; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire; so that the forests were crackling all about him; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, a still, small Voice. And the Voice spoke comfort and peace.

The Voice of the storm and the Voice of the silence are one. God, who rules above the convulsions of Nature and the confused noise of nations at strife, is the same God who bids us enter into the secret place of his pavilion and commune with him. And wherever he speaks, he speaks a benediction.

The God who sitteth above the waters is come near to us in the person of Christ, who said to his disciples in the upper room, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you: let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Thus, to one who reverently hears and heeds, comes the peace that passeth all understanding; peace that floweth like a river in the soul; "peace eternal, sacred, sure"; the very peace of God.

III

THE TRAVELLER'S GUIDE (A New Year's Sermon)

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
from whence doth come mine aid.
My safety cometh from the Lord,
who heav'n and earth hath made.
Thy foot he'll not let slide, nor will
he slumber that thee keeps.
Behold, he that keeps Israel,
he slumbers not, nor sleeps.

The Lord thee keeps; the Lord thy shade
on thy right hand doth stay:
The moon by night thee shall not smite,
nor yet the sun by day.
The Lord shall keep thy soul; he shall
preserve thee from all ill.
Henceforth thy going out and in
God keep for ever will."

PSALM 121: (Old Version).

IT is a mystery to me why so many people want to make a noise on New Year's eve instead of calmly contemplating the past and girding their loins for the race that is set before them.

There are various ways of "seeing the old year out." One is that of the revellers who betake themselves to the cabarets and dance-halls, for no conceivable reason unless it be in the hope of drowning the memory of the mislived past. A better way is

that of our Methodist friends who keep "watch-night" in their churches. They spend the passing hours in prayer and thanksgiving until the clock strikes midnight, when all unite in "Wrestling Jacob," that most picturesque of Wesley's hymns:

"Come, O thou Traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see;
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with thee;
With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

"I need not tell thee who I am;
My sin and misery declare;
Thyself hast called me by my name;
Look on thy hands, and read it there:
But who, I ask thee, who art thou?
Tell me thy name, and tell me now.

"I know thee, Saviour, who thou art,
Jesus, the feeble sinner's Friend;
Nor wilt thou with the night depart,
But stay and love me to the end:
Thy mercies never shall remove,
Thy nature, and thy name is Love."

I am frank to say, however, that I did not "watch the old year out." I went to bed as usual, but I could not sleep; the anticipation of the midnight uproar was on my nerves. In the borderland of semi-consciousness I seemed to see a man sitting before an open ledger, his face greatly troubled because the record was against him. Then I saw a Hand reaching over his shoulder, and as it moved across the page it left a red stain which obliterated all his liabilities; and a Voice said, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee!" The

man looked up as if to express his thanks; but just then a whistle blew and bells began to ring, and I awoke, across the border of the year. Then above the noise and uproar I seemed to hear a great congregation singing the last lines of Wrestling Jacob:

“Thy mercies never shall remove,
Thy nature, and thy name is Love.”

It has been my usual custom to select some portion of Scripture as a sort of oriflamme, or red-letter epigraph for the year. The choice for the incoming year is the One hundred and twenty-first Psalm.

This is known familiarly as “The Traveller’s Psalm,” and will therefore be appropriate. For what are we but travellers? Here we have no abiding city: we are strangers and sojourners, looking for a better country, even an heavenly, and for a city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

“Gently, Lord, O gently lead us,
Pilgrims in this vale of tears,
Through the trials yet decreed us,
Till our last great change appears:
And when mortal life is ended,
Bid us in thine arms to rest,
Till, by angels bands attended,
We awake among the blest!”

In the superscription of this Psalm it is called a “Song of Degrees.” It is one of fifteen, from CXX to CXXXIV inclusive, which were so called probably because they were sung by pilgrims on their way to the annual feasts at Jerusalem. On such occasions the roads were thronged with travellers from every part

of Jewry. This particular Psalm was sung in all probability when they caught sight of the Sacred City, "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth." How grateful to the eyes of the travel-worn pilgrims was the dome of the Temple, which to them was the ancestral centre of the worship of the true God.

The Psalm is constructed on a perfect rhythmical plan. It consists of four stanzas or strophes, in which are set forth the three incommunicable attributes of God; and these are finally summed up in his providence, or constant care.

The first stanza celebrates the divine Omnipotence. *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.*

You may think it makes little difference, so far as practical piety is concerned, whether the world came to pass by the calm process of natural law or by a creative fiat.

It made a great difference to Job, however, when, in the midst of suffering which was due in large measure to self-will and intellectual pride, he was rebuked by the Voice out of the whirlwind saying, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up thy loins now like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

It made a great difference to Moses, also, when he climbed the steeps of Nebo singing his farewell song: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before these mountains were brought forth,

or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God!"

And it makes a great difference to all who are trusting in Christ for their salvation; since the Maker of heaven and earth is also the Saviour of men. He who sat upon the circle of the universe and called into existence things that are out of those that were not is none other than Christ, as it is written: "All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made." He who created is mighty to save! Nothing is too hard for him. He is able to save, even unto the uttermost, all that come unto him.

The second stanza sets forth the divine Omniscience. *He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*

A sentinel may sleep at his post as the enemy draws near; a pilot may sleep at the wheel as the vessel speeds toward the reef; a weary mother may sleep with an ailing infant in her arms; but he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. "Hast thou not known; hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not neither is weary? "There is no searching of his understanding."

Ours is the God of the ever-open eyes. O those eyes of the Lord, that "run to and fro through all the earth to behold the evil and the good!" Are we afraid of them?

When Lafayette was a prisoner, during the Revolutionary War, he was distressed beyond measure by the fact that a guard was continually watching him through an aperture in the door of his cell. But

those were the eyes of an enemy. Well may the Omniscience of God be terrible to those who are not on friendly terms with him.

But to those who love him his unceasing watchfulness must be a source of unspeakable joy. The bond-woman who fled from oppression in Abraham's tent and betook herself to the wilderness was bowed down in utter loneliness and desolation until the Angel of the Covenant spoke to her. Then, filled with wonder and gratitude, she called the name of the place Beer-lahai-roi, that is, "Thou God seest me."

The third stanza celebrates the divine Omnipresence. *The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night.*

If the Lord is our keeper, who shall harm us? The donjon of the castle is called "the keep," because it is a safe retreat. How much safer is the fortress of the divine presence; for as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord around about them that fear him.

To those who are at odds with the Father it is a dreadful thought that he is "never far from any one of us." It was under the sense of flagrant sin that David cried, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth

as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to thee!"

So it was with Jacob, when, fleeing from the spectre of an unforgiven sin, he dreamed the golden ladder and awaking cried, "Verily, the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not!" But many a man, under like circumstances, finding comfort beyond words in the thought of the divine Presence, has resumed his journey with the song,

"Though like a wanderer,
The sun gone down,
Darkness be over me,
My rest a stone;
Yet in my dreams I'd be
Nearer, my God to thee,
Nearer to thee."

In the fourth stanza the divine Omnipotence, Omniscience and Omnipresence are all summed up in Providence. *The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.*

Our life is made up of goings out and comings in. It begins with a coming in and ends with a going out; and all between is naught but going out in the morning and coming in at nightfall. And during this monotonous round we are ever under the watchcare of the "Divinity that shapes our ends."

The man in "Pilgrim's Progress," who started out from the City of Destruction, was never without a Voice to direct him. In the Valley of Humiliation, climbing the Hill Difficulty, passing through Vanity

Fair, crossing the Enchanted Ground, and onward to the Delectable Mountains and the Land of Beulah, his Guide was always with him. As he forded the deep river and came in view of the Celestial City the gates rolled back, and, amid the ringing of the city's bells, he passed in to behold the King in his beauty.

O blessed Providence that never forsakes us! O wonderful promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end!"

"I have a friend so precious
So very dear to me;
He loves me with such tender love,
Loves me so faithfully;
I could not live apart from him;
I long to feel him nigh;
And so we dwell together,
My Lord and I."

So shall this Song of Degrees be a strong staff to lean upon in this New Year. As it is written: "Commit thy ways unto the Lord; trust in him and he shall bring it to pass."

What shall he "bring to pass?" Every dream of conquest over sin; every hope of salvation "worked out" into character and usefulness; every aspiration toward a holy life; every ambition to make our energies tell for the glory of God. Has he not promised that all things shall work together for good to them that love him?

Who shall say what the future has in store for us? "I know not what awaits me; God kindly veils mine eyes." Thanks for my blindness! To-morrow is in better hands than mine.

~~"So on I go, not knowing:
I would not if I might.
I'd rather walk in the dark with him
Than go alone in the light;
I'd rather walk by faith in him
Than go alone by sight."~~

The Omnipotent is able to care for me. The Omniscient knows my every need. The Omnipresent will "never, no never, no never forsake me."

This will
"I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."

So do I fare forth into the New Year, like an explorer crossing the border of an unknown land. No one has ever before been this way. Therefore, I must needs walk by faith, hand in hand with him.

One thing I know, beyond all doubt and peradventure: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

He

IV

THE TRUMPETS OF ZION

"I was glad when they said unto me,
Let us go into the house of the Lord.
Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.
Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact
together:
Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord,
Unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto
the name of the Lord.
For there are set thrones of judgment,
The thrones of the house of David.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
They shall prosper that love thee.
Peace be within thy walls,
And prosperity within thy palaces.
For my brethren and companions' sakes,
I will now say, Peace be within thee.
Because of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek thy good."

PSALM 122.

WE act, as a rule, without conscious motives.
Habit is second nature. We work, and play,
and eat and sleep as a matter of course.
We are wound up at night like a music box, and in
the morning we proceed to play the tunes set for us.
When the Sabbath comes (If we have any; for, alas,
there are people to whom a real Sabbath never comes)
we put on a different habit with our Sunday clothes.
The bell rings and we go to church, as a horse goes to

the manger after his work in the tread-mill, because it is a part of the routine of life. But if church attendance is worth while we ought to be able to give a reason for it.

The man who wrote the 122nd Psalm was a church-goer. It would appear that when he heard the footfall of a company bound for Zion he listened to their invitation, "Let us go into the house of the Lord" and joyously accepted it. And, on thinking the matter over, he was able to give five reasons for doing so.

His first reason was that it was "the House of the Lord": as it is written, "The Lord is in his holy Temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."

The Ark of the Covenant was in the Temple; and this was the historic symbol of the presence of God. He had promised, "I will meet with thee and commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the wings of the cherubims which are upon the ark." A further assurance of his presence was given in the mysterious cloud, called "the Shekinah," which hovered over the sacred place.

I am aware of the saying "all ground is holy ground"; which is true; but some ground is holier than other ground. The Greeks, though pagans, were aware of this. When they were about to erect a temple the priest drew a circle around a certain space and set it apart: hence the word "Temple," which is derived from *temno*, meaning to "cut off." The space thus enclosed was secluded and separated from all the rest of the world for sacred uses.

It has pleased God to promise a peculiar manifestation of his presence in places set apart for his worship. He is omnipresent, to be sure, and therefore we

can find him anywhere; but never so near, never so approachable, never so easily entreated as at the mercy seat in the trysting place.

In the desert of Midian there was one spot which, by reason of its associations, was more sacred to Moses than any other: it was the place where he saw the acacia bush "aflake with God." He said, "I will turn aside and see": but out of the bush a Voice admonished him; "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the ground whereon thou standest is holy ground"; and as he stood with face bowed upon his breast he received his great commission, "I AM THAT I AM hath sent me unto you!"

On the heights of Luz there was a spot more sacred to Jacob than any other. It was where he lay down at nightfall,—a lonely man and God forsaken as he thought—and saw in a vision the ladder of light with angels going up and coming down to assure him that God remembered him. "Verily, the Lord is in this place," he said; "this is none other than the gate of heaven." And he called it Bethel, that is, "the house of God."

The second reason given by the Psalmist for church attendance is "Thither the tribes go up."

The twelve tribes were usually at odds with one another, for obvious reasons; but when the Levites blew the ramshorns on the heights to summon them to the solemn assemblies, they forgot their differences and came together as to a great gathering of the clans.

At the time of the annual festivals the thoroughfares were thronged with multitudes on their way to Jerusalem to worship. They came from every direction: Asshur from the northwest, with the sheaf upon his

banner; Benjamin from beyond the Cedron; Dan from the head waters of the Jordan; Ephraim waving his standard, whereon were the horns of a unicorn; Gad from the fords of Jericho; Zebulon from the lake region; and Napthali, "the hind let loose." All marched under their own peculiar standards; but as they neared the Holy City they folded their banners and bowed together in worship of a common God.

It is an uplifting thought that, as we sit together in this sanctuary, there are millions on millions, the world over, of many tongues and nations, assembled in churches and cathedrals, in meeting houses on the remote frontiers, in conventicles among the hills, under banyan trees in "the regions beyond," all lifting up holy hands with their hearts to the same God whom we worship and rejoicing in the salvation which has come to us through the atoning grace of his beloved Son.

The poor and the rich thus meet together and acknowledge the Lord as the Maker of them all. Two shibboleths are theirs, "Father" and "brethren"; for there is one God and Father of all.

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love!"

The third reason given by this man for going to church is that the "Testimony of the Lord" is there: a clear reference to the Oracles, or Word of God.

A place in the side of the Ark was set apart for the preservation of the parchments which were written from time to time by holy men as they were moved by the Spirit of God. The original nucleus of the sacred volume thus formed was the Protevangel or

primal prophecy of Messiah, "The Seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head." To this were added in the process of time the Law, the Annals and the Prophets together with the Psalter, which was the inspired Hymn Book of the Jews. These constituted "The Testimony of the Lord," to which were referred all questions pertaining to national and spiritual life.

On the Sabbath it was customary for the Priest to read a portion of this Testimony and expound it as the lesson of the day. This exposition was the sermon.

We are accustomed to speak of "expository sermons": but in fact there is no true sermon which is not expository. The man who shoves his Bible aside and assumes to speak by personal authority, as if to say, "I am Sir Oracle and when I ope my lips let no dog bark" is out of place in the pulpit.

The reason why the people come to church is because they are troubled with doubts and questionings for which there is no solution except in the Word of God. They care nothing for the personal opinion of a man whose breath is in his nostrils; but they are profoundly concerned to know what God has to say about the great verities. Wherefore it behooves all preachers to hide themselves behind the Testimony and give forth a clear utterance as to the divine will.

The fourth reason given by the Psalmist for going to Zion is that "the Thrones of David are there."

The use of this plural "thrones" is significant. Inasmuch as David had but a single throne it is obvious that the reference is to his dynasty. As for himself he had no hereditary title to any throne. God "took him from the sheep cote, from following the sheep, to

be ruler over his people"; and in so doing he entered into a perpetual covenant with him saying, "I will establish the throne of thy Kingdom forever." In other words, he was to rule by a perpetual succession until the coming of Shiloh, the Prince of Peace, of whose dominion there should be no end. This was "great David's greater Son."

On the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem he was welcomed with the cry, "Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David!" The hope of the coming of this Messiah was called "the hope of Israel"; and back of all other motives this was what drew the people to the Temple, whether they knew it or not.

It is for a like reason that people go to church in these days. The deepest longing of the average man is not for any of the adventitious attractions which are frequently held out. At the back of his mind and at the centre of his heart is a desire to solve the problem of eternal life. "Is there a way to escape from the shame and power and penalty of sin?"

The only answer to that question is Christ and him crucified. He said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." What need of other attractions if the great Magnet be lifted up?

Oh, that all ministers might stand closer to Calvary, the throne of David's Son! For he will draw the people, and will keep on drawing until every knee shall bow before him.

The fifth reason given by this man for going to church is that the secret of prosperity is there. "They shall prosper that love thee."

Who is the prosperous man? Is it the man who is arrayed in purple and fine linen and fares sumptu-

ously every day? Is it one whose vaults are filled with bonds and mortgages? Is it one who has attained to such high honours and emoluments that all bonnets are doffed when he goes by?

The span of our present life is but the small arc of an infinite circle. How then shall we measure prosperity by earthly possessions, all of which shall presently take wings and fly away?

The only prosperous man is he who is safeguarded for eternity; who has his treasures laid up in bags that wax not old; who is rich in possessions which the world can neither give nor take away. He alone is prosperous who is thus "rich toward God." For him the mislived past is blotted out, purged by the blood that cleanseth from all sin; and the future is spanned by a rainbow of hope. He has peace with God, power for service, and the prospect of eternal life.

These are the things that make prosperity: and these are the goings out of Zion. The people who devoutly assemble there are not living within the narrow circumscription of time but, stimulated by the joyous hope of life and immortality brought to light in the Gospel, they seek a better country, even an heavenly, and a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

To a casual observer the people who frequent our churches are not more prosperous than others.

This was observed by Celsus, the great satirist who in the second century assailed the church as an assembly of reprobates. He said, "I have seen in your conferences some who are recognized as former drabs and drunkards and thieves. You have none of the richer and more learned class. Your Master himself

who was a humble carpenter, is in evidence as to the character of his followers, inasmuch as he said, 'I am come not to call the righteous but sinners.' "

He was answered by Origen on this wise, "You are right in saying that our Lord came not to call the righteous but sinners; but you are unfair when you pause there. His words were, 'I am come to call not the righteous but sinners *to repentance*.' The former profligates whom you have seen in our assemblies were taken by our Master out of the very gutters and transformed into newness of life. He called them to contrition and reformation; and their consistent walk and conversation bear witness to his saving power."

This is the glory of the Gospel, that it goes out into the highways and hedges in quest of lost sinners and sets them on their feet, with the past forgiven and the future glorified, with hearts full of peace and faces toward the sky. This is the sort of prosperity that, as Alexander Pope said, makes the Christian "the highest style of man."

I have recited the reasons given by the author of the 122nd Psalm for honouring the sanctuary service; but *there is another reason* for our going to church in these days. We have the advantage of some thousands of years of intervening history which emphasize the fact that *the Church is the power house of God*.

Out of it have gone forth the great forces which have made for progress and universal betterment. The light of civilization has radiated so far forth from the Church of Christ that the whole civilized world is called by his name. Draw a line around "Christen-

dom " and you have practically excluded all darkness and included all light; you have excluded ignorance and included all institutions of learning; you have excluded barbarism and included humanity. That is to say, the great dynamic of progress has its seat and centre in the house of God.

If this be called in question, let those who are not habitual church-goers be asked whether they would be willing to dispense with the church: and with one consent they would answer no. A churchless city, a churchless community, a churchless country would be a hissing and a byword. However a man may hold himself aloof from the sanctuary he knows that he shares its by-products; that he eats of its clusters as of a vine growing over the wall.

It is a true saying, " Blessings brighten as they take their flight."

If you were ever a wanderer in some far country where there were no spires pointing like figures toward heaven, you know how to sympathize with the exiled Jews in their Babylonian song " We hanged our harps on the willows and wept when we remembered Zion."

Do you recall how the Ancient Mariner, returned from his weary wanderings, on hearing the bells ringing for a wedding at the church, intercepted one of the guests to say,

" O wedding guest, my soul hath been
Alone on a wide, wide sea;
So lonely 'twas that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be?"

And that the lesson of his lonely isolation had come home to him is evidenced by his adding,

“Oh sweeter than the marriage feast
’Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With the goodly company.”

It may be that there is some one present, not an attendant at the sanctuary, who has simply happened in, perhaps in the hope of whiling away a weary hour. If so, my friend, I trust I have given you some conception of the real value of the privileges of Zion. But in any case, I do not intend to part company with you until I have advised you as to the latest news from the front. I do not mean the last advices from “somewhere in Flanders,” but news of peace, the peace of God that passeth all understanding, the peace that Christ alone can give by reconciling us with God.

This is the last thing out; “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

This is the message which the Church must ever proclaim; as it is written, “The Spirit and the bride say Come; and let him that heareth say Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely.”

This water of life is to be had for the taking. Will you take it?

V

THE FORBIDDEN TREE

"Now the serpent was more subtile than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."—
GENESIS 3: 1-6.

WE call Genesis "the Book of Origins" because it gives an account of the beginning of the world and the present order of things.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, land and sea, organic and inorganic matter, trees and herbs, birds and beasts and fishes of the sea: and man his masterpiece to have dominion over all.

He also set in operation the forces and principles

which were to develop the institutions of domestic, industrial and civil life.

It would be singular, under these circumstances, if no account were given of the origin of sin.

For sin is an omnipresent and inescapable fact. The question is, "Whence came it?" Obviously it did not simply happen to be. It is here; and it has no business here. It is an exotic; not to be regarded in any sense as an essential or necessary part of human experience. We would all be infinitely better off without it. But here it is; how are we to account for it?

At this point the scientists are dumb. They have undertaken to explain pretty much everything else; but so far as I am aware they have not successfully tried their hand on sin.

It is only reasonable to suggest that the Biblical record should remain until some other and better view is proposed wherewith to supplant it.

In some quarters the Biblical story of the Fall is characterized as "a myth." It is my present purpose to carefully consider and analyze this alleged myth. What are its essential parts?

The first item in the narrative is Man.

The best definition of man as originally created is found in the word *anthropos* by which the Greeks characterized him. It literally means "the uplooker." He was made erect, with his face toward the throne of God. In other words he was a rational being not only able to think but, as Kepler said, "to think God's thoughts after him." In this he was differentiated from all the lower orders of life.

But this superiority over the lower orders goes deeper still; it ranks him not simply as a rational,

but as a moral being, that is, capable of character. Having been created in the likeness of God it is obvious that he was intended to be like God. "Be ye holy, saith the Lord; for I am holy."

As yet, however, he was not holy but merely innocent; that is to say, free from actual sin. The capacity for holiness was there but it remained for him to realize it. That, however, would be clearly impossible unless he were not only rational and moral but free.

I cannot conceive how God could have created man without a sovereign will. In that case, having no power of choice, he would have been simply a lay figure. His untried innocency was like that of a block of marble which has no stain upon it.

In order to attain "unto the measure of the fulness of the stature of a man" he must work out character for himself; and the power of choice between good and evil was necessary to that end.

It will be remembered that when the battleship "Oregon" was launched she was regarded as an experiment. Whether she would answer her purpose or not remained to be seen. But after Captain Evans had taken her around The Horn and back again, she was justly pronounced a tried and trusty ship.

In like manner, if man was to be approved as a divine masterpiece, he must be exposed to trial. As he left the creative hand he was without positive character: the best that could be said of him was that he was negatively free from sin.

The second item in the narrative is The Tree.

There was nothing in this particular tree that distinguished it from others in the garden. Its fruit was like theirs, no better and no worse; and "it was fair

to look on." The only thing which differentiated it from the other trees was that it was, as the Germans say, *verboten*; that is, under the ban, as God said, "Thou shalt not eat of it."

The name by which it was called is significant; "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

If Adam partook of its fruit he would, by his disobedience, come into an experimental knowledge of the actual difference between sin and holiness.

It was therefore the tree of destiny. If the man refrained from partaking of this tree he would enter into life; in other words, character. If he disobeyed he would die, that is, be alienated from God.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the death here threatened was not physical death or extinction. It was impossible for Adam thus to die, since God had breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and made him a living soul; which means that he was endowed with immortality. How could one cease to be whose life was a spark thrown off from the eternal fire? For better or worse he was as imperishable as the God who created him.

But it *was* possible for him, by crossing the purposes of God to part company with him; and this he did. This crossing is "trans-gression"; and transgression is spiritual death; or alienation from God.

The third item in the story is The Tempter.

He is called "the adversary." As God's purpose was to realize to the uttermost the splendid possibilities of this new created man, the purpose of the adversary was to bring him into enmity with God.

In what guise did he present himself? Had he been permitted to come as an angel of light, that would

have been to take an unfair advantage of the man. Had he come *in propria persona*, with horns and hoofs as he is often represented, he would have put himself at such a disadvantage as to make success impossible. It would have been an easy matter for Adam to reject the overtures of such a foe.

How then should he appear? In what better or more alluring guise than that of a serpent; silent, sinuous and "more subtle than any creature which the Lord had made"? The temptation was thus offered in most seductive form.

It is objected, however, that the serpent is represented as speaking; and who ever heard a serpent speak? Ah, who has not? Have you never read of Uriah Heep, or of Dr. Jekyll, or of Kipling's Vampire, "a rag and a bone and a hank of hair"? Is there a man or woman in this presence who has not heard the articulate hiss of the serpent gliding by?

The fourth item in the narrative is The Temptation.

This was of a character that quite beseemed an adversary whom our Lord characterized as "a liar and the father of lies."

The tempter began by denying the truth of God; "Yea, hath God said?" Here is an intimation that the divine word is merely a myth and not to be depended on.

He then called in question the goodness of God, saying; "Ye shall not surely die." What he meant was, "Do you suppose a good God would inflict so severe a penalty for such a little thing as eating of this tree? Nay, impossible! Ye shall not surely die."

And then he boldly assailed the divine integrity, by intimating that there was something behind all this:

"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall know good and evil, and be as God."

Thus the temptation was worthy of the father of lies. There is this to be said however to the credit of Satan, that in each instance he was, so to speak, an honest liar. He did not come in canonicals, professing loyalty to God's word while seeking to undermine it.

The fifth item in the narrative is The Result: "And he did eat."

In believing Satan rather than God, this man sustained a threefold loss.

To begin with, he lost his innocence. His soul had previously been a *tabula rasa* without a stain upon it. The whiteness now was gone; his soul was defiled with the black spot of sin. For sin is "any want of conformity unto or transgression of the divine law."

He lost his self-respect also: "His eyes were opened and he knew that he was naked." That was the birthday of human shame. It was no longer possible that the man should have a good opinion of himself. Write

"'Ichabod' upon his forehead,
For the glory has departed!
Far off he stands with fearful eyes,
Nor dares to lift them to the skies."

Furthermore, he lost his life: the possibility of that large, eternal life which had been opened up before him. Had he obeyed he would have been forever on cordial terms with God. As it was, on hearing the voice of God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day he hid himself among the trees. He was now

at cross purposes with his Maker and himself. It remained to be seen whether he could regain the ground which he had lost and be again at peace with God.

But how are we personally concerned in this matter? Can we be held responsible for Adam's sin?

Let me in this connection, call to your remembrance two obvious facts. One is that we are by lineal descent the children of Adam; and the other is that we are all sinners: as it is written, "There is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It is for us to say whether there is any logical connection between these two indubitable facts.

I am not going to insist on the doctrine of original sin. Let it suffice that there is something to be said for the scientific doctrine of "heredity," which amounts to the same thing. If it be not true that, in the words of the New England Primer, "In Adam's fall, we sinned all," it is at least indisputable that from our earliest moments of conscious life we are all alike sensible of a tendency toward sin.

A question of far more practical importance is, *What shall we do about it?*

A man in a burning house would not be likely to busy himself with a discussion as to the chemical properties of caloric; he would straightway look for a fire escape and proceed to take advantage of it.

The facts being clear, the supreme problem is, How to escape from the desperate situation in which we find ourselves; a difficulty that involves us in spiritual and eternal death unless we can somehow extricate ourselves from it.

It would scarcely be expected that the good God

who had created man in his own likeness would leave him in this extremity without exhausting all the divine resources, if necessary in order to deliver him.

He had made a covenant with Adam in which eternal life was promised on condition of obedience to his holy law. The "covenant of works" was broken, and the penalty—of which he had been duly admonished—was "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

But the man was given another chance. The "covenant of works" having failed, he was offered a new covenant called "the covenant of grace." No sooner had Adam sinned than he received the prophecy of a coming Saviour who was to deliver him and all succeeding generations from the shame and power and penalty of sin. At the very gate of Paradise the protevangel was proclaimed; "The Seed of woman shall come in the fulness of time and bruise the serpent's head."

The only condition affixed to the full benefits of that covenant was an appropriating faith in the Saviour who stood at the centre of it.

We find a singular significance in the fact that Christ is called "the second Adam"; as it is written, "The first Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickened spirit; for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. The first man is of the earth earthy, the second man is as the Lord from heaven." By this we are given to understand that whereas Adam by his disobedience passed under the sentence of death, the second Adam, being made in the likeness of sinful man, paid the full penalty by his vicarious death; so that whosoever

believeth in him—that is to say, whosoever is willing to accept the benefits of his atonement—shall enter into an eternal life of full, complete and eternal reconciliation with God.

The first Adam yielded to the temptation of the adversary to reject the Word of God; the second Man went out into the wilderness to be tempted in like manner; but to every suggestion of disobedience he answered, “It is written.” And having been tempted thus, in all points like as we are, he is able to succor them that are tempted. He not only saves us from the penalty of sin, but comes to our relief in the hour of temptation, and so lends a hand that we may be able to withstand in the evil day and “having done all, to stand” and quit ourselves like men.

In view of these things it is difficult to see how God could have done more for his vineyard than he hath done for it. He has cast up an highway so plain that the wayfaring man, however foolish, need not err therein. He who receives the incarnate Word of God upon the authority of his written Word has recovered all his lost estate, and more; for “where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded.”

If we cannot claim the innocency of the original Adam we can claim a pardon so complete and comprehensive that we stand in God’s sight as if we had never sinned against him.

And beyond that, the righteousness of Christ himself, is imputed unto us by faith in him. We thus become “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away.”

It appears, then, that everything is summed up in Christ who is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. He is our Alpha and Omega; first, last, midst and all in all.

As I sat on my piazza, one day in the country, a Syrian came up the walk with his little boy. The man carried a pedler's pack and, as he had nothing to offer which I cared for, I beckoned him away; but he came right on. He could speak no English; but his boy had learned a little. I asked where they came from. The boy answered "From Mount Lebanon in Syria." I asked if they knew Henry Jessup, the missionary. The old man, catching the name, threw up his hands crying, "Henry Jessup; he, Jesus man!" I asked what they knew about Jesus. The man caught that word also and haltingly replied, "God-so-loved-the-world-that-he-gave-his-only-begotten-Son-that-whosoever-believeth-in-him-should-not-perish-but-have-eternal-life."

He had discovered the saving truth! My friends, it's all there: "God so loved the world!" Let us believe it.

VI

THE GREAT AMNESTY

“Come now, and let us reason together, said the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”—ISAIAH 1: 18.

THE prophecies of Isaiah cover a period of about forty years, when Israel was hastening to its fall. The Temple had been practically abandoned and the people were flocking with one accord to the altars of the pagan gods.

Clouds of disaster were gathering thick and fast. Egypt and Assyria were in arms and Babylon was coming to the fore. The upper and nether millstone of internal corruption and outward assault were rapidly closing in upon the doomed nation.

Meanwhile Isaiah stood almost alone as a witness for Jehovah. “Faithful among the faithless, only he.” His sermons were in the form of warnings, remonstrances and persuasions, earnest exhortations; all being delivered as manifestoes from the throne of God.

In our text we have one of these. It was probably affixed to the closed doors of the Temple: and one may easily imagine the feelings it awakened in those who passed by.

The Baalites smiled and wagged their heads. “The

old prophet," they said, "is behind the times"—an observation which has a strangely familiar sound in these days.

The religious leaders of Israel may have been moved with compunction of conscience; but why should they protest? "Everybody is worshipping Baal and it behooves us to follow the fashion."

There must have been some, however, who read the parchment with a deep longing for the old religion, like that of David when he craved a drink of water from the well beside the gate at Bethlehem.

"Oh, that old-time religion,
It is good enough for me."

But it was too late to arrest the momentum of error. On went the fatuous nation, rushing upon the bosses of the shield of God.

This Proclamation has a perpetual significance, as one of the God's State Papers. It is addressed "to all whom it may concern"; and it concerns all sinners of every age. For whatever may be the vicissitudes of time, there are three constant factors in the problem of history; to wit, God, man and the reconciliation of man with God.

I. Observe the Headline.

It purports to be a Decree of Absolution. Its thesis is The Pardon of Sin. It proposes to answer the question which lies deepest in the human heart: "What shall I do to be saved?"

This is a question that demands our earnest consideration, because the issues of eternal life and death are in it.

A young man who was obliged to submit to a surgi-

cal operation for a critical malady, looked into the face of the surgeon and said pathetically, "You know, doctor, what this means. You won't fool with me, will you?" So here; there is a call for serious thought: the scalpel grazes so near the centre of life!

II. Observe the Red Seal upon it: "Thus saith the Lord."

This means that the message is authentic and trustworthy.

The opinion of Isaiah himself in these premises is of little moment. What we want to know is, Does he bring a communication from God? And if so, what is it?

The question is discussed by agnostics and rationalists from the standpoint of personal opinion; who frame their conclusion in such terms as "I think thus and so." But who cares what they think about it? We want no ifs or peradventures: no guesses or conjectures. We must have a Yea and Amen.

The problem has to do with salvation; and its solution lies beyond all human ken. If solved at all, infinite wisdom must solve it.

In the time of our Civil War, when battles were pending and the lives of dear ones were in the balance, the newspapers were full of canards, and rumours of all sorts filled the air. But when we saw on the bulletin boards a statement bearing the signature, "Stanton, Secretary of War," we knew that we could depend upon it.

So in the present case. Will God keep silence when men and women made in his likeness are perplexed and bewildered and crying, "What shall we do?" No; here is a message from the throne, bearing the

red seal of authenticity ; wherefore we can rely upon it.

III. Observe the Call: "Come now, saith the Lord."

Strange language, when we pause to consider it. Can we not see the wistful look on the Father's face as he thus appeals to us?

Who speaks? God. And who is this God? "Behold thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art—God!"

Of the essential God we know but little: nevertheless we must believe in his existence; for so it is written, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

We know, however, that he is the high and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity, and that angels and archangels veil their faces before him, crying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!"

And we know that he is love; else why should he say, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that all should turn and live. Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?"

And to whom is he speaking? To men. What is man? "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him; or the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

He is the creature of God's hand; and as such is as relatively insignificant as a mote flying in a sun-beam. More and worse than that, he is a rebel against the divine law.

Will a man, when stung by a wasp, hesitate to crush it? Why, then, should God extend his overtures of mercy to those who persist in disobeying him? "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Why not? We can only account for this by saying, "His thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways."

IV. Observe the Invitation: "Come now, saith the Lord, and let us reason together."

Here is no short shrift for confessed criminals, but an appeal to the reason of unreasonable men.

What a tribute to the dignity of our fallen nature! Is it a ruin? Yes, but a splendid ruin even at its worst; for man in his lost estate is still by nature a child of God.

He is the only creature with whom God can reason; and by this fact man is differentiated from all the lower orders of life; as it is written, "How much better is a man than a sheep."

He alone can sin. The sun hears the divine behest "Go forth upon thy daily course," and it obeys. Man alone is at odds with the laws of his being, since he can defy God—and take the consequences.

And he alone can repent. For the monitor in his bosom, however wronged and silenced, still, on occasion, shakes its gaunt finger at him.

And he alone can pray. "He can think God's thoughts after him," as Kepler said, reasoning *pro* and *contra* with the infinite Being who created him.

And what a tribute have we here to the condescension of God! His authority is veiled, for the moment, while he stoops to conquer. He calls the

sinner not to trial but to argument. It is as if he said, "Sit thou there and I here; and we will confer as to the matter in hand."

Here is also an eloquent tribute to the reasonableness of our religion. It asks only to stand upon its merits. It courts the verdict of every thoughtful man.

The only thing in the world that the religion of the Bible dreads is human indifference; as it is written, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

If men would only consider, the world would soon fall in with God's overtures in the Gospel of his grace.

V. Observe the Conference.

The sinner is now presumed to be sitting face to face with God. The question at issue is the old question, "How shall God be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly?"

And what shall the sinner say?

He is urged to "produce his strong arguments." What are they? Shall he plead innocence? Nay; there is not a man living in the world who does not instantly respond to the statement, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

Shall he say that he sinned for want of knowledge? Not that, surely; for all along he has been clearly advised concerning the heinousness of sin and the retribution that surely follows it.

Can he say that he did not mean to sin? No; for he is aware of many presumptuous sins, which were

deliberately committed against his conscience, "accusing or excusing him."

Can he say that he could not help it? He knows, on the contrary, that he is unable to point to a single sin in his whole life that was not distinctly voluntary. For all sin is by the exercise of a sovereign will or in obedience to wilfully contracted habit; otherwise it would not be sin.

What then shall he say for himself? Nothing! He can only enter the crestfallen plea of "Guilty." Guilty and with no loophole of escape!

If there were any doubt he would surely have the benefit of it; but there is none. The crowning evidence of his guilt is confession.

He admits his default and is helpless to remedy it. In his efforts to escape punishment he is like Sisyphus, rolling a stone up a steep ascent only to have it ever rolling back upon him.

In his hopelessness he is like Prometheus, chained to the rock of the Caucasus, crying, "I must endure my pain until one of the gods shall take my place and bear it for me." But where is the god who will bear it?

So much for man's place in the conference. Now what does God say? One thing only: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

This is God's answer to the silent shamefaced sinner. He has a plan for his salvation; a plan briefly comprehended in the single word blood. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin."

A man once under conviction of sin had this dream:

he seemed to be travelling in a vast plain, weary and famishing, in the face of an approaching storm. He came, at length, in the gathering twilight to an upright beam at whose foot he fell exhausted and clinging like a weary child. In the deepening night he saw monsters with red eyeballs glaring at him—the wraiths of many sins. But for some reason they could not reach him. Then he felt a warm drop on his face. It was blood! Looking up, he perceived the dim outline of the Cross and knew that he was safe.

“Beneath the Cross of Jesus,
I fain would take my stand.
The shadow of a mighty Rock,
Within a weary land.
A home within the wilderness,
A rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noon-tide heat,
And the burden of the day.

“There lies beneath its shadow,
But on the further side,
The darkness of an awful grave
That gapes both deep and wide;
And there between us stands the Cross,
Two arms outstretched to save,
Like a watchman set to guard the way
From that eternal grave.

“I take, O Cross, thy shadow,
For my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine
Than the sunshine of his face;
Content to let the world go by,
To know no gain nor loss,—
My sinful self, my only shame,—
My glory all the Cross.”

One question only remains, How shall we get the benefit of this? Here enters the doctrine of Justification by Faith. "He that believeth shall enter into life."

Faith is acceptance. It is the hyssop branch that sprinkles the blood upon the heart, as of old it sprinkled it upon the lintels of the door in pursuance of God's promise, "When I see the blood I will pass over you!"

If any is a "universalist," I more. I believe that Christ died for all and that all may be saved through him. But as a sensible man, I am constrained to believe, also, that no man can be saved against his will. The Scriptures affirm, over and over again, that there is one condition affixed to the free gift of salvation, namely, that a man shall accept it. He must be willing to be saved that way.

So it is written, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life: and he that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth on him." That is, if he refuses—actively or passively—the sanctity of his sovereign will is so respected that he remains where he chooses to be.

In this case, his condition is worse than it would have been if he had never heard of Christ.

Is there any other plan of salvation? I know of none.

There are other religions and philosophies that suggest the propriety of "turning over a new leaf"; but good resolutions cannot blot out the mislived past. Can a man cancel his debts by resolving henceforth to pay as he goes? Does not every hour of the day have its own responsibilities, leaving no margin for

works of supererogation? If I, from this moment, were never to commit another sin, how in reason would that expiate my past sins?

If a man were standing on the edge of an abyss separating time from eternity, with the lights of heaven shining in the distance; and if a bridge were to be seen crossing the abyss, and one bridge only, would it not be the part of reason to cross it?

All that God asks of any one is that he will deal fairly with himself. He invites the sinner to stop and think. He wants him to go apart from the cares and perplexities of life long enough to hold conference with his Maker as to the great problem of destiny. Alas for those who refuse to thus reason with God; who hurry on to Judgment with no preparation for it.

A father was once reading the Parable of the Prodigal Son to his child, who had before him a picture of the wayward youth in the far country, sitting on the trough in the swinefield, gaunt with hunger, in rags and tatters. As the story proceeded the boy, unable to restrain himself, cried, "O why doesn't he go straight home?"

That was the voice of common sense. God wants to be gracious. The lights are kindled in the windows of his house. The homeward path is plain. Why does not every prodigal say, "I will arise and go"?

VII

THE HAND OF MACBETH

"Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool."—ISAIAH 1:18.

IT is a far cry from Isaiah to Shakespeare: but a reference to one of the terrific scenes in "Macbeth" will help us, perhaps, to a clearer view of the relation of the Cross to the pardon of sin.

Act II, Scene 2.

(Enter Macbeth, looking on his hands) This is a sorry sight!

Lady M. A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.

Macb. There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried,
"Murder!"

That they did wake each other; I stood and heard them.

One cried, "God bless us!" and "Amen," the other,

As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
Listening their fear, I could not say "Amen,"
When they did say, "God bless us."

Lady M. Consider it not so deeply.

Macb. But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen?"
I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat.

Lady M. These deeds must not be thought
After these ways; so, it will make us mad.

Macb. Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep"; the innocent sleep;
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

Lady M. What do you mean?

Macb. Still it cried, "Sleep no more! . . .
Glamis hath murder'd sleep; and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!"

Lady M. Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength, to think
So brainsickly of things. Go get some water,
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.

Macb. Whence is that knocking?
How is't with me, when every noise appals me?
What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine
eyes!
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine!

The question arises, Why should Macbeth be so deeply distressed by a crimson stain on his hand? A little water would easily wash that off. But was there something beneath it? In truth, the trouble lay deeper down; it was the ingrained sense of sin! — *what a we have all*

I. *Sin is a Fact.* *little & few the world is in*

This needs emphasis, because there is a disposition in some quarters to explain it away. There are those who regard sin as a physical malady, to be healed by

proper dieting and therapeutics. This, however, was not the ^{of a physician} prognosis of the royal leech; for when Lady Macbeth entered, walking in her sleep and rubbing her hands, with a smothered cry, "Out, damned spot! Will these hands ne'er be clean?" he observed, "More needs she the divine than the physician." Here is a touch of true philosophy on the part of the great dramatist. The stain is more indelible than crimson on the hand. Sin lies deeper than the smarting uncleanness of any ^{literary} overt act: and it behooves us to get at the root of it.

II. *Sin is a Universal Fact.*

The malady of Macbeth makes him brother of us all. "For there is no difference; all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

By this we are not to understand that all alike are guilty of conspicuous vices. In fact, there are many respectable sinners among us.

It would have been difficult to find in all Jerusalem a more presentable group of church members than the Pharisees who dragged the adulterous woman to Solomon's Porch and threw her at the feet of Jesus saying, "Moses in the Law requireth that such as she shall be stoned; but what sayest thou?" He stooped in silence and wrote with his finger on the pavement, while the poor creature with the scarlet letter on her brow crouched before him. But see those Pharisees now slinking away: as it is written, "They went out one by one, beginning with the eldest." Why so? They had followed the finger of Jesus as he wrote, "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone at her." Were they adulterers, then? Oh, no! Not one of them would have been guilty of that par-

ticular sin. Nevertheless there was no room for stone throwing: for they all lived in glass houses and knew it.

III. *So, then, sin is a Personal Matter.* *— not at all this*

It comes home to you and me. Why are we not all in Sing Sing? Is it because we have not broken the law? Who are these men and women in stripes? Thieves, adulterers, murderers. That however is not why they are behind the bars. In the light of the Sermon on the Mount the Ten Commandments condemn us all. Covetousness is theft! Hatred is constructive murder! Adultery flames in a lustful glance! The reason why these people are in Sing Sing while we go scot free is not because they have broken the Ten Commandments but because they have broken the eleventh; "Thou shalt not be found out." We have not broken it.

I am aware that *Man + 2* ~~people~~ *think of me* do not like to be addressed in this way. *not moral* They feel as Lady Huntington did, who went in her carriage to hear George Whitefield preaching in the open fields and drove away indignant because, as she said, "He called me a vulgar sinner, like the rabble about him." Yet this is Bible truth and everybody knows it. *2 all day*

IV. *Sin is a Germ-disease.* *I had a woman*

A friend of mine who has suffered from intolerable pain, ~~for a fortnight~~, so that physicians could not relieve her, tells me that *she* ~~she~~ went out yesterday to an X-ray operator who discovered a microbe gnawing in a sinus near the eye. The Lord, in like manner, lays his finger on the germ of sin when he says, "He that hath offended in one point is guilty of the whole law," thus tracing our malady to our first sin.

The word "trans-gression" means a crossing of divine law. If a planet leaves its orbit, however slight the departure, there is no power save that of its Creator that can restore it. It is thenceforth an outlaw. The old name for sin is ~~anomia~~: which means "out of order." The instant a soul violates the divine law, which is also the law of its own being, it is henceforth and—so far as its own power is concerned—forever alienated from God.

A shepherd in the Valley of Chamonix saw an eagle leave its ^{nest}eyrie on the mountain and wheel majestically through the air. Then suddenly, with drooping wings, it fell like a stone. On examination he found that an adder was coiled around it. The moment the adder struck its poisonous fang, the eagle fell.

The reason why sin does not cause immediate death in the same way is because there is mercy in God. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that all should turn unto me!"

But ah, that turning! There is the difficulty. We sin and live and still keep on sinning and are spared; but never of ourselves do we return to God. Can the Ethiopian change his spots? Can a wandering planet swing back into its orbit? What hope, then, is there for us?

V. Sin is a Malignant Disease.

"It eateth like a canker." It eats at nerve and sinew, and to the very marrow of the bone; so that our whole physical being is corrupted by it.

It eats into mind and conscience and heart; so that our whole spiritual nature is defiled by it. "Out, damned spot!" cries Lady Macbeth: and her word

is well chosen, for sin means condemnation: "When it is finished, it bringeth forth death."

The prophet Isaiah uses no exaggeration when he says, "The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises and putrifying sores."

The so-called doctrine of "total depravity" does not mean that there is nothing good in us, but that every power and faculty of body and soul is affected by sin.

VI. *This malady is Incurable by any human means.*

The ingenuity of science and philosophy has found no germicide for sin. In a paper mill the scarlet rags are separated from all others because their colour is "fast." It cannot be extracted without destroying the fibre. All sin is scarlet; all guilt is "blood guiltiness." It is essentially homicidal and suicidal, too. Thus saith the Lord, "Though thou wash thee with nitre and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me."

So, then, Macbeth is right: "All great Neptune's ocean cannot wash this blood clean from my hand!" And Lady Macbeth is right: "Here is the smell of blood still! All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." Ours is apparently a desperate case.

But possibly death will erase the crimson stain? No, death destroys nothing; not even the body, and certainly it cannot change character. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still!"

VII. *What then shall we do?*

This is an echo of the cry that was raised on the day of Pentecost, when Peter said to the multitude, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Ye have taken Jesus of Nazareth, approved of God by miracles and signs, and with wicked hands ye have crucified and slain him!" They saw the crimson stain; and "being pricked to the heart, they cried out, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said, 'Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins!'"

This is God's answer to our perplexity. He sent his only begotten Son to bear the shame and penalty of our sins in his own body on the tree: so that, "who-soever believeth in him should not perish but should have everlasting life."

In the last scene of the tragedy, Lady Macbeth is represented as saying, "Come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone!" This is quite true. There is no undoing of the past; but God's thoughts are not our thoughts. There is another way.

A few weeks ago I was present at a "Campfire" of Federal and Confederate soldiers who met to exchange memories of the Civil War. The conversation turned to narrow escapes; and presently the chairman said to a grey-haired veteran, "General, have you nothing to recall?" He answered, "I have nothing to say for myself; but I should like to repeat a story that a comrade told me not long ago. He said that during the Campaign in the Wilderness, the Confederate officers were forewarned that spies were to be sent through the lines to discover the disposition

of their troops. A number of sharp-shooters were accordingly put on sentry duty and enjoined to be watchful and to fire on sight. My friend took his place on a hillside and lay with his musket beside him. An orchard was below and a wood beyond it. He saw three men presently making their way through the wood and acting suspiciously. He aimed once and again but could not fire. Though he had been in many engagements he had never aimed deliberately at any particular man. He had a mortal dread of sending a soul into eternity. But presently the foremost of the spies entered the orchard and, as he was dodging from tree to tree, the sentry aimed and fired! The man threw up his hands and with a gush of blood from his forehead, fell and lay with hands stretched out. His two companions fled. That night ~~my friend~~ ^{the man} could not sleep. The spectre of the dead man haunted him. It 'murdered sleep.' As time passed he fell into a settled melancholy. The war was over; but day and night, the spectre of that dead man in the orchard was before him. Not long ago as my friend was travelling through Iowa he entered a smoking-car and fumbled vainly for a match. In the seat before him was an old man whom he asked for a light. The man turned and showed a Grand Army badge on the lapel of his coat. This led to reminiscences of the war, in the course of which the Grand Army man told of a narrow escape he had while serving in the Wilderness. He had been sent with two companions to learn the disposition of the Confederate troops. In approaching the lines they came to an orchard, where he must have been careless, for a bullet struck him and he knew no more. His two companions fled; but at nightfall

they returned and carried him to the hospital, where he lay for weeks in delirium. 'My recovery,' he said, 'was a miracle; for see where the bullet struck me.' With that he raised his hat and showed a scar from the centre of his forehead and backward where the bullet had ploughed its way. Up to this point my friend had listened in silence with his heart in his throat; but now he sprang to his feet and screamed, screamed for joy! The horror of the weary years was gone!"

Oh, that it were possible thus to undo the past! "I would give my life," said John B. Gough, "if I could undo the things this guilty hand has done!" It cannot be.

But, in divine mercy it has been provided that the record may be blotted out. The past may be submerged as in the depths of an unfathomable sea! The Word of the Lord is: "I will cast your sins behind my back: I will remember them no more against you." Wonderful thought of God! The thing which is otherwise impossible is accomplished at the Cross.

The only condition affixed to the divine plan of salvation is that we shall accept it. How plain, how simple and reasonable! "Come, now, saith the Lord, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow, and though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." Do you know any other way?

"Only believe!" Only believe and the fountain that is filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins does instantly what "all great Neptune's ocean" could never do. The stain is blotted out!

The conclusion of the whole matter is found in the

last will and testament of the man who wrote Macbeth :
“ I commend my soul into the hands of God, hoping
and assuredly believing, that through the only merits
of Jesus Christ my Saviour, I shall be made partaker
of everlasting life.” *

May we thus rest our hope in him !

* In a lecture by Dr. Thomas of London on “ The Theological Views of Shakespeare ” he says, “ All the schools of infidel thought are accustomed to parade the intellectual merits of the great dramatist: but, while feathering the arrows of their arguments with the productions of his mind, they nevertheless disparage the Book which he recognized as divine and in whose mental, if not moral, sunshine he bathed his genius. To extol Shakespeare and deride the Bible is therefore like praising the brook and belittling the mountain springs that feed it, or praising the moon and belittling the sun from whom she borrows her light.”

It is true there is no evidence to show that Shakespeare lived a Christian life. On the contrary, his writings reflect much of the corruption of the theatre of his time. But there is no denying that his acquaintance with the Scriptures was the source of practically all that is sweetest and purest in his plays: and however his life may have fallen short of his creed his last Will and Testament shows that he was intellectually in harmony with the Gospel of Christ.

VIII

THE BEATIFIC VISION

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King! Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me!"—ISAIAH 6: 1-8.

IT is important to note the influence which this vision had on Isaiah's life and character; for it cannot be imagined that such an event would be without definite results. It was in fact a heart searching, revolutionary experience; insomuch, that he could never again be the same man.

It produced three definite impressions upon him.

The first had to do with God.

He says, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." By this we are not to understand

that he really saw the essential God. "No man can see God and live."

On a bright morning you look out of your window and say, "I see the sun": by which you mean only that you see the corona which surrounds it. The prophet saw the seraphim, each of them having six wings, with twain covering his face, with twain covering his feet and with twain poising for flight to do his Lord's will. He saw the foundations of the Temple shaking and trembling. He saw the Shekinah, the pillar of "smoke."

And that was all he saw.

But it was enough to assure him that God was sitting upon his throne, controlling the affairs of the children of men. It was enough to satisfy him that notwithstanding the desperate condition of affairs in Israel, the Lord had not abdicated his authority but was still competent to administer in all things. And the heart of Isaiah was lifted up accordingly within him.

So did the courage of John, the Evangelist, revive when, in lonely exile, meditating on the persecution of his brethren, he saw the Lord walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks and heard him say: "I am He that liveth and was dead and, behold, I am alive forevermore and have the keys of death and hell!"

If ever our courage fails, when the fountains of the great deep seem to be broken up, let us also lift our eyes to the Lord sitting upon His throne, high and lifted up. The darkest clouds are far this side of heaven, where in calm majesty the King wields his sceptre.

Up with your hearts! *Sursum Corda!* God is our

refuge and our strength; a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

But along with this glimpse of the divine majesty came also voices announcing the divine holiness. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" He dwelleth in light and glory unapproachable. The stars of heaven are not clean in his sight. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Angels and archangels veil their faces before him.

The second impression had to do with himself, as revealed in the reflected light of the divine glory.

He had been Court Chaplain now eighteen years; and little wonder if, on entering the temple, clad in his canonicals, he felt a sense of personal importance as the prophet of God. But his pride was riding to a fall.

In the light of this unveiling the prophet saw his own littleness. Gazing toward the throne-room of the universe he felt as David did, with his face turned upward to the over-arching skies, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, what is man that thou art mindful of him and the son of man that thou visitest him?"

The tendency of our time is to magnify man and minimize God. There are those who make no scruple of intruding upon the divine Oracles, or taking liberties with the Infinite. They thrust God aside, usurp his prerogatives, discuss the gravest problems with an air of omniscience and take upon themselves the responsibility for the general management of mundane affairs. Thus fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

For such arrogance as this there is no remedy but the ineffable vision of the divine glory.

Of still greater significance was the awful exposure of his own sinfulness which came to Isaiah in this experience. Far as he was removed from God by the fact that he was a mere infinitesimal in the presence of the Infinite, he was still further removed by an overwhelming sense of ill-desert. "Woe is me," he cried, "for I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; and mine eyes have seen the King!"

He mentioned his lips particularly because, as a prophet, he had been commissioned to witness for God. He now perceived that he was not worthy to name God, much less to witness for him. Thus does our iniquity separate us from God and thus do our sins hide his face from us.

The third impression had reference more particularly to the relation of Isaiah with God.

He was definitely informed that, notwithstanding his insignificance and imperfection, a personal place was assigned to him in the divine plan.

It was eighteen years since he had received his original commission and he had sought faithfully to discharge it; but he was now to start afresh. This vision was destined to have a stupendous effect upon him. The Lord had greater things for him to do than he had ever dreamed of.

But before he could enter upon this enlarged sphere of usefulness he must be qualified for it. The oppressive sense of his sinful unworthiness must be taken from him. His lips must be purged. "Then flew one of the seraphim, having a live coal from off the

altar, and laid it upon his mouth, saying, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquity is taken away."

This coal from the altar of sacrifice spoke unmistakably of the sacrificial Lamb of God. His blood is like fire, in that it burns out sin. And only so is a man prepared for the service of God.

Now came the divine call: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah had long served under the constraint of duty; but there must be no compulsion in the service of his after-life. The future was dark before him. He saw no prospect of success. He was summoned to go forth on a forlorn hope. Would he go?

The response was immediate: "Here am I; send me!"

His words rang like those of Paul when, having seen the sunburst and heard the Voice on the way down to Damascus, he cried, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He also had seen the King; and the vision transformed his life. He was ready for whatever awaited him: henceforth not duty but the love of Christ constrained him.

Then followed the prophet's instructions: "Go thou to a people whose ears are heavy, whose eyes are holden, whose heart is fat; to a people that will not hear thee!" Was it strange that he answered, "Lord, how long?" Alas, there was for him no hope of brighter days. "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the land be utterly desolate, and only a remnant remains of the holy seed." In other words, his preaching was to be as water poured upon the ground. He was to warn a nation that was doomed

to die. He was to beat the air. He was to fail for God.

But what of that? Is not this "the whole of man, to fear God and keep His commandments?" Not success but faithfulness is required of us.

The great harvests of the Lord have ever been reaped from the graves of those who have toiled in the night.

The old-time priests and prophets all failed. If the ministry of Christ be measured by visible results, he failed too. Paul and the apostles failed. Augustine and Xavier and Judson and Carey failed; but only as men count failure. "He always wins who sides with God!"

In the long sweep of the centuries success is nothing but simple, unquestioning, patient obedience to the divine will.

The lesson of the beatific vision is of practical import to all who profess the service of Christ. It is many years since some of us closed in with the overtures of mercy and, accepting Christ as our Saviour, set out to follow him. Have we been content with mere perfunctory obedience? Have we only been marking time when we should have been engaged on the high places of the field?

If so a vision like that of Isaiah would open up a new world of happy usefulness in the Christian life.

It is our high privilege to see the King. He has been pleased to unveil himself before us, not enveloped in "smoke" but visible to our fleshly eyes. Listen to this: "He that hath seen me," said Jesus, "hath seen the Father. How sayest thou then, 'Show

us the Father?' Believeest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me?"

The theophanies of the Old Testament were but foregleams or adumbrations of Christ. In him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He is the exegesis of God. To see him is to behold a vision that casts down and lifts up again; that convicts and converts; that reveals our unworthiness and at the same time endues us with supernatural power.

This is the vision that opens the door of efficiency in the spiritual life.

I have in my study a remarkable book called "The Ten Theophanies," by Dr. Baker, whose name is not unfamiliar in the annals of lighter literature. As his life was wearing to its close he felt a consuming desire to publish his conception of the unveiling of God. The book that resulted was written with a hand growing feebler and feebler, until it was finished in full view of heaven. Here are its concluding words: "*Try to bring home to yourself this Friend of mine, who is God yet man, and man yet God. He is ever lovingly near, in the unlimited prime and plenitude and power of his everlasting grace.—The man who is writing these lines cannot see them for happy tears. He trembles because unable to contain, while yet unable to express, the thought Immanuel, God with us! And now, awaiting the appearing of our Lord, let me sound his praise. The blessed and only potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto. To him be honour and glory everlasting!*" His labour of love was finished; the pen dropped from the trembling fingers; a new Theophany had burst upon the

writer's soul. He was in the midst of the beatific vision, at home with the God who had unveiled himself before him.

To one who has thus looked on God, revealed in the majesty and holiness of his beloved Son, there must of necessity come a corresponding conviction of littleness and unworthiness.

So it was with Peter on that morning by the lake of Galilee when he and his fellow fishermen, having toiled all night and taken nothing, saw the Master on the shore. At his bidding they "cast their nets on the right side of the ship." Then came the miracle! Peter had long known Jesus and endeavoured to serve him; but in that wonderful moment he caught a glimpse of his Lord's majesty and of the ineffable holiness which ever accompanies it that filled him with an overmastering awe and forced from his lips that strange and apparently inconsequent cry, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

Thus to see Christ is to see ourselves, not as others see us, but as we really are in the clear white light of his countenance.

And never until we have caught this vision, shall we be the sort of Christians that we ought to be. Never until then shall we rightly apprehend our place in the plan of God. Never until then shall we escape the drudgery of duty and enter on the joy of voluntary service with the cry, "Here am I; send me!"

Meanwhile, let us cease from measuring life by what men call success and hold ourselves in readiness to fail, as men count failure, if our Lord so wills it.

A hopeless dreamer of dreams was Elijah until on Horeb he caught the vision. He shook and trembled

as the earthquake and the tempest and the fire passed by: after that came the still small Voice, "Go, return!" Then and there a new and better life began for him. He knew now that the King was on his throne, high and lifted up; and that this God was his God forever and ever!

O, that the Voice might come to us, to us who feel our inefficiency and would fain enter upon a higher and more useful life!

We may have the vision if we will. The Voice is calling, "Whom shall I send, and who will go with us?"

Are we ready to answer, "Here am I; send me"?

IX

A PRAYER THAT SHOOK THE HILLS (Preached on "Peace Day")

"The Prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth"
(i.e. in the major key).—HAB. 3.

OUR representative at the Court of France from 1776 to 1785 was Benjamin Franklin. At that time a tidal wave of infidelity was sweeping over the nations. In France the malign influence of such leaders as Voltaire and Rousseau was preparing the way for the unspeakable horrors of the Revolution. One evening Franklin, as the guest of honour in a distinguished company of infidels, was requested to read what he regarded as the finest masterpiece of literature. He chose this Prayer, introducing it as "a Pindaric ode." At its conclusion there were exclamations of "Wonderful! Wonderful!" on every side. "But this is not Pindaric," they said, "where did you find it?" He replied that it was written by an old prophet named Habakkuk. "Habakkook? Habakkook?" they answered; "we never heard of him!"

Little wonder they had never heard of him, since the Bible was so generally a forgotten book in those days.

The words of Habakkuk are more than a Pindaric ode, more than a stately masterpiece of literature,

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more than a surpassing outburst of dramatic oratory: they are a monumental prayer, involving within its narrow limits the whole philosophy of approach to God.

At the outset the prophet is seen standing upon a watch tower, "to see what the Lord will say, and what he shall answer him." He sweeps the horizon, and descries in the far distance the approaching army of the Chaldeans. There is danger to the Holy City and no adequate provision to meet it.

1. *He hears a Voice:* the voice of God; whom the sins of a stiff-necked people have provoked to holy indignation.

"I heard," cries Habakkuk, "and I was afraid!"

There are times when God speaks, as he did to Elijah on Carmel, in "a still, small voice," full of peace and comfort and hope; and again with a voice like the portentous roll of thunder. So we are hearing it in these terrible days when half the world is on the firing line. Louder than the controversies of nations, louder than the footfall of advancing armies, louder than the clash of steel and roll of heavy artillery is the voice of an indignant God.

Who is not afraid? Let the nations tremble and all the earth keep silence before him!

2. *The prophet falls upon his knees.* What else could he do?

"O Lord," he cries, "revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy!"

How little he knows the issues that are involved in that plea.

It is an awful thing to pray. The child that kneels

beside its trundle-bed at night, saying, "Now I lay me down to sleep: I pray the Lord my soul to keep," touches a live wire that connects this old sin-cursed world of ours with the dynamo of the universe. It is a stupendous thing to touch it.

We are praying just now that God will make an end of the horrors of war. He will answer; but he reserves the right to answer in his own way. His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are his ways our ways. The map of the world may be changed in answer to these prayers of ours for the Truce of God.

I have been spending a week in the forests of Maine. In the inns by the crossroads at evening I have seen the farmers gathering in groups and settling the affairs of the embattled nations as if they knew precisely how to do it.

I have attended from year to year the Peace Conferences at Lake Mohonk where the wise men and women of the nation have come together in the interest of international comity. A little while ago we were confident that there would never be another war. An arbitral Court was to be established at the Hague for the settlement of all international disputes: and it was a foregone conclusion that there could be no further resort to arms. Alas, "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft a-glee."

Have we been leaving God out of the reckoning? He stands within the shadow keeping his own counsel. The world, indeed, is moving on toward a final, righteous and universal peace; but how, or when, or by what unexpected and fearful cataclysms, is for him to say.

Not a prayer that ascends from the sanctuary or the

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trysting place is unheard; nevertheless when he answers he must needs answer like a God.

3. *But here we note an interruption.*

"The man who kneels yonder on the watch tower is little better than a fool," some say, "if he expects the infinite God to turn aside from the calm enforcement of his rigid laws and disarrange the machinery of the universe to hear his prayer and answer it." Is that so?

Not long ago an engineer was speeding a passenger train through the Water Gap, when he saw something that forced his hand to the lever. It was a woman, running from a cottage door with both her hands uplifted, screaming to him. A moment later, as the locomotive swept around a curve, a little child was seen playing heedlessly between the rails. Stop the train? Surely!

That is what God sees and hears every moment of every day. Nor is there any machinery of his which does not allow for such uplifted hands and such agonizing cries. Is it to be supposed that his wisdom is less or his heart harder than ours? "Ye do err, not knowing the power of God."

To your knees, therefore, and up with your hearts! He is the hearer and answerer of prayer.

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

Let it never be forgotten, however, that God must answer for himself: not always according to our way of thinking, but in his own wise time and way.

4. *And here he comes.*

God to the rescue! The man on the watch tower is heard and answered after a method more wonderful than his wildest dream.

Behold the triumphal march! "God comes from Teman and the Holy One from Paran." The valley of the Arabah, between those mountains, with thundering Sinai in its midst, is in commotion. The heavens are suffused with glory; sun and moon stand still in their habitations; the deep lifts up its billowy hands to greet the mighty One. The mountains tremble and the perpetual hills are bowed. God rides upon his chariot of salvation, his naked bow in hand and arrow drawn to its head. Before him goeth the pestilence and burning coals are under his feet. Light radiates from his hands like horns of power. He stands and measures the earth! The tents of Cushan and Midian are shaken as by a whirlwind. The heads of the Great Powers are stripped even to their stubborn necks. They said "Let us break his bands asunder and cast away his cords from us!" He laughs and holds them in derision.

Why all this commotion?

This is God's answer to the prayer of the man on the watch tower, "O Lord, revive thy work; in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy."

We are praying for peace. Back of that is the great prayer, "Thy Kingdom come." This is the immemorial plea of all God's people. But as we make

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that prayer let us remember that God reserves the right to answer in his own wise way. If he come with bow and arrow, the pestilence before him and coals of fire under his feet, so be it. We must take the consequences of our supplication. The coming of God's Kingdom may involve the overturning of all other kingdoms in fire and blood.

"The Lord our God is clothed with might,
The winds obey his will.
He speaks and in the heavenly height
The rolling sun stands still.

"Ye nations bend! In reverence bend!
Ye monarchs wait his nod!
And bid the choral song ascend
To celebrate our God."

We have offered our prayer and in the commotion of the nations the Lord is answering us. The prayers of all the centuries, the prayers of Washington at Valley Forge, the prayers of Lincoln after Gettysburg, the prayers of the little people at their trundle-beds; innumerable prayers for peace and, above all, for the coming of the Kingdom and the universal and perpetual truce; all these have gone up to high heaven and the Lord is taking the petitioners at their word. He comes from Teman and Paran with stupendous glory to bring in the Golden Age. The world is convulsed at his approach. The rebellious nations are shrieking the Hymn of Hate. But God stands "measuring": and their wrath shall yet praise him.

On the darkest day of our Civil War, March 1st, 1864, General Grant was made Commander in Chief of the American Army. He was instructed to com-

bine all our scattered and disorganized forces and conquer peace at any cost. In pursuance of that order he thrust thousands and tens of thousands of men into a blazing chasm; and then, standing amid the rising clouds of battle, he said, "Let us have peace." As we look backward now through the vista of the years it is plain to be seen that, frightful as was the price we paid, the outcome was worth it.

So will our children review the carnage of these days and say, "God knew best." If the wrath of men and nations must need exhaust itself in war, far better have it burn itself out in one awful conflagration than continue through more and more weary centuries in a running fire of perpetual strife.

If only, when this is over, the world shall see the utter absurdity of arms and armament!

If only it shall be proven beyond peradventure that, from the mere economic standpoint, peace is cheaper than war!

If only the beatitude of the great Peacemaker shall descend and forever rest upon us!

The like was never seen. Half the world and more on the thin red line. "Gog and Magog to the fray!" But the Lord knows how to manage the affairs of this world and, whether we like his way of doing things or not, we shall have to leave the issue with him.

I have said it is an awful thing to pray. Nevertheless, let us pray on! Let us get right with God and keep in touch with him. Let us bring all our plans and purposes into harmony with his. Let us be willing to take the responsibilities involved in prayer; knowing that the God of infinite wisdom will answer wisely and well; and saying ever "Thy will be done!"

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Moreover, let every prayer of ours, like that of Habakkuk, close with an Amen of confidence:

“Though the fig-tree shall not flourish,
Though no fruit be in the vines,
Though the labour of the olive fail
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stall;
Yet will I rejoice in the Lord
And joy in the God of my salvation.”

On a dark night the disciples of Christ were caught in a terrific storm on the Sea of Galilee. In vain did they labour at the oars. Would that the Master were there to quiet the storm! But alas, he was three miles away; and they were at their wits' end. On a sudden they saw Him, walking on the crested billows and drawing near; but they knew him not. They supposed it to be a spectre: and “they were affrighted.” How often he comes to us thus, answering our prayers in some unexpected guise. Far more frightful than the storm is the spectral Presence in the midst of it. But listen; “Be not afraid; it is I!”

It is a true saying, “God’s in his heaven; all’s right with the world.” We mark his stately steppings in the progress of the ages.

In Lauderdale’s Version this Prayer of Habakkuk is entitled, “I sing the Warrior and his mighty deeds.”

From the protevangel at the gateway of Paradise he moves along the centuries to the final strife at Armageddon and “the restitution of all things.”

Wars and rumours of wars are incidents made necessary by the wrath of men: but all are subsidized to the final issue, “the one supreme divine event to

which the whole creation moves"; namely, the triumph of the Prince of Peace.

Never has God's hand in history been more manifest than now. Some hundreds of millions of people have been kneeling at the threshold of every opening day to ask of God that his will "may be done on earth as it is in heaven." His answer to that prayer is heard in the roar of ten thousand cannon on the firing line. Shall we murmur if he takes us at our word? Nay, rather, let us listen like Elijah with our faces between our knees until we catch the undertone of prophecy which assures the coming of a brighter and better day.

And meanwhile, let no happening, however portentous, disturb our faith. It is written, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee."

No storm can rage so furiously as to drown the majestic voice of him who rules the winds and waves: "Fear not; it is I."

X

THE BELLS OF BETHLEHEM (A Christmas Sermon)

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder.

And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”—ISAIAH 9:6-7.

THE Word of the Lord is yea and amen. When he told Adam, who had been beguiled by the serpent, that the Seed of Woman would come in the fulness of time to bruise the serpent's head, he meant it. But the years dragged their slow length along until centuries had passed, and still he came not.

The shadows deepened into an Egyptian night. All open vision ceased and the lights went out. Then Isaiah rang the chimes of prophecy with a gladsome sound.

THE FIRST NOTE

“His name shall be called Wonderful.” Wonderful in his birth; as it is written, “Great is the mystery of godliness, God is manifest in flesh: the angels desire to look into it.” Who shall explain the inter-

weaving of Deity and humanity, as warp and woof, in the fabric of this Child wrapped in swaddling-bands and lying in a manger?

Wonderful in his life—a life briefly comprehended in this monograph, “He went about doing good”—a life so blameless that he who lived it could challenge the world to lay anything to his charge—a life so immortal that its influence along the centuries shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

Wonderful is his death; for never man died like this Man. He tasted death not for himself but for every man. He was innocent of sin, yet he bore the burden of the world’s sin until his great heart broke under it.

Wonderful in his resurrection; for by the power of an indwelling life he triumphed over the King of Terrors and, ascending up on high, took captivity captive that he might forevermore give gifts unto men.

Wonderful—most wonderful—in his life after death; for now he sitteth upon his throne high and lifted up, directing the course of current events. “Is it not amazing,” said Napoleon, “that whereas the ambitious dreams of Caesar and Alexander and myself should have vanished into thin air, a mere Judæan peasant should be able to stretch a dead hand across the centuries and control the destinies of nations and the children of men?”

THE SECOND NOTE

“His name shall be called Counsellor.” That is to say, he shall answer the world’s need of counsel. And what do men want but to know the way—the way

of truth and righteousness—the way back to God? If ever thou standest at the crossroads, unable to discern betwixt the worse and better reason, behold, thou shalt hear a Voice behind thee saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” And if thou knowest not the Voice, remember the words of the Lord Jesus how he said, “I am the way, and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.”

THE THIRD NOTE

“His name shall be called the mighty God.” We shall never see God except as he has revealed himself in his only begotten Son. When Moses desired to see the divine glory he hid himself in a cleft of the rock and saw nothing, heard nothing but the rustle of a garment as the Lord passed by. Come now to Bethlehem and behold the hiding of infinite strength! Is proof demanded of the Godhood of Jesus? Leave that to the theologians. For us the breaking of the day requires no proof. It is enough that the joy of the morning quivers in the air, that the time of the singing of birds is come, that the eastern sky is radiant with advancing light, that the world grows brighter under the influence of the Sun of Righteousness with every passing hour.

THE FOURTH NOTE

“His name shall be called the everlasting Father.” How then shall he be the only begotten Son? In the mystery of the ineffable Trinity there are not three Gods but three persons in one: and Jesus is “the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” As Ulysses, returning from the wars, unbuckled his armour that

his children might recognize him, so the Father unveils himself in the person of Christ. "Show us the Father," said Philip, "and it sufficeth us." And Jesus said, "Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. How sayest thou then, 'Show us the Father?' Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me?"

THE FIFTH NOTE

"And his name shall be called the Prince of Peace." His Gospel is the Gospel of Reconciliation; of reconciliation between God and man by the blotting out of sin, and of man with his fellow men by the Golden Rule which is destined to bring in the Golden Age. How, then, after the lapse of nineteen centuries, should the nations be arrayed against each other? The day never dawns with a sunburst. In due time he that shall come will come and will make no tarrying. But the way to ultimate peace is over many a bloody field. "I am come," said Jesus, "not to bring peace but a sword"—a sword that shall ever leap from its scabbard when the beacons of justice and humanity are kindled on the hills. Progress is a fact, and history is not a closed book. We can afford to wait. Meanwhile the royal standards onward go.

THE SIXTH NOTE

It was seven hundred years before the bells were heard again. Then clear and resonant they rang out. "His name shall be called Jesus!"

In Bethlehem of Judea a mother is crooning a lullaby to her Child lying in a manger. This is the

long-looked-for Messiah, "whom kings and prophets longed to see and died without the sight." The naming has been arranged for. The angel of the annunciation said, "His name shall be called Jesus, *because he shall save his people from their sins.*" The five prophetic names—Wonderful, Counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father and Prince of Peace are here rolled into one.

"There is no name so sweet on earth,
No name so sweet in heaven,
The name before his wondrous birth
To Christ the Saviour given."

By virtue of his office as Saviour "the government is upon his shoulder." The picture is of an oriental sovereign bearing the keys as the symbol of a rightful reign. And with this investiture comes a great promise, "Of the increase of his government there shall be no end,"—a promise which is abundantly verified by the logic of events. There has never been a year nor a day since the advent of Christ that has not witnessed such an increase of his authority. At that time all Christendom was embraced in a little patch of sunlight on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, which has widened in the process of the years until it covers the whole civilized world. The feeble band of five hundred that gathered on the Mount of Ascension has multiplied into some hundreds of millions; and others are continually falling in.

But "the end is not yet." God moves in great cycles of time. With him one day is as a thousand years. Wherefore after the lapse of nineteen centuries we are still waiting—waiting and crying, "How

long, O Lord, how long?" But he that believeth shall not make haste. Listen!

THE SEVENTH NOTE

"His name shall be called King of kings and Lord of lords!"

Have you heard it, sounding loud and clear above the roar of the world's artillery? Blessed are they who can interpret the signs of these troublous times! It would appear that the war in which the nations are now engaged marks the beginning of the end. The Prince of Peace leads his white battalions against the hosts of darkness. It is truth against error, justice against oppression, humanity against frightfulness, Christ against the prince of the power of the air. And the end may be seen from the beginning: for "his Kingdom shall be established in justice from henceforth even forever!"

Where shall we look for an authentication of this hope? "*The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall perform it.*" This zeal, literally "the burning" of the Lord,—is witnessed in every battle waged today. The God of justice is vindicating his right to reign from the river unto the ends of the earth. The Great Powers totter to their fall. The smoke of Armageddon will presently be dissipated and we shall see, inscribed in letters of fire across the skies, the name that was written on the swaddling-bands of the Child of Bethlehem, "King of kings and Lord of lords."

The conviction of the ancients that the problems of history are insoluble was embodied in the grim statue of the Sphinx looking down with bewildered eyes on caravans moving out through the desert into

the unknown. One of the masterpieces of French art, called "The Repose in Egypt," represents the virgin-mother at night resting in the arms of the Sphinx with the divine Child asleep on her bosom. But today we have another vision of that Child, awaking not only to solve the problems of history but to claim his own. Here is what Isaiah saw:

"Who is this that cometh from Bozrah; this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?"

"I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save!"

"Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, as one that treadeth the wine-press?"

"I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me! I looked, and there was none to help; therefore mine own arm brought salvation!"

This is the Lord who bringeth salvation today; and the world trembles at his coming. Listen and you shall hear the Bells of Bethlehem ringing out for his coronation; and behold, all principalities and powers shall bring their honour and their glory unto him.

The path of progress must needs be over an undulating country; but it leads right on to the Golden Age. Wherefore let the sons of Asaph raise the tune, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!"

Laugh on, O children, at your happy firesides: dance round the Tree of Gifts, and lead your elders in the service of praise. Noel! Noel! Let hope revive beneath the lurid skies and faith discern the coming of the Truce of God.

"Ring out wild bells, to the wild sky!

"Ring out the old, ring in the new!
Ring out the false, ring in the true!

"Ring out old shapes of foul disease,
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

"Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand,
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be."

XI

LIFE ON THE JERICHO ROAD

"And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."—LUKE 10:30-27.

THE way the so-called "Parable of the Good Samaritan" happened to be spoken was this:

A certain lawyer (by which is meant not a barrister, but an expert in the Mosaic law) came to Jesus with the purpose of "tempting" him or putting him to the test, asking what he should do in order to inherit eternal life.

The Lord thereupon directed his attention to the *shema*; or "frontlet between his eyes," on which were written the two great commandments, saying, "What is written in the Law; how readest thou?"

The man's answer was in the words of his frontlet, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind; and Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Jesus said, "Thou hast answered right; this do and thou shalt live"; which was in accordance with the covenant of works, "He that doeth the law shall live by it."

But the lawyer was not satisfied. His conscience was apparently clear so far as his relations with God were concerned, but he was not so clear about his relations with his fellowmen. As a loyal Jew he recognized no special obligation to any who did not belong to the household of faith. Wherefore, "wishing to justify himself," he asked, "But who is my neighbour?"

Then Christ told this story of the Waylaid Traveller; in which he cleverly turned the tables on his questioner by answering not the question "Who is my neighbour?" but the vastly broader one which lies at the centre of all true philanthropy, "Whose neighbour am I?"

This is usually spoken of as a Parable; but there is no sufficient reason for so regarding it. On the other hand, it sounds like an account of an actual occurrence. Had there been a daily newspaper in Jerusalem the incident would probably have been announced in such headlines as these:

VIOLENCE ON THE JERICHO ROAD.

A TRAVELLER WAYLAID AND ROBBED.

HE IS BEATEN AND LEFT FOR DEAD.

But whether we regard this as a parable or not, it is clearly an apologue of life. We are introduced to four men who started out on the Jericho Road on the eventful day referred to.

The first is the Traveller. He started on his journey alone; and he should have known better, for the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was proverbially a dangerous one. It was called, and is still called, "The Bloody Way." A portion of it runs through an ancient river-bed, a deep ravine with caves and inaccessible cliffs furnishing lurking places for banditti. Ali Babi and his forty thieves are there. No prudent footman ventures on that road without a dragoman and band to safeguard him. But this traveller went unattended; and it was a foregone conclusion that he would be robbed along the way.

The highroad of life runs through like dangers. Its most lamentable tragedies are due to the rejection of the divine Guide and the inspired Guide-book. How many have thus fallen among thieves, to find themselves despoiled of their faith by false teachers and of their character by tempters and temptresses lying in wait for the unwary. When one's Bible is lost and his habit of prayer and his good conscience he is indeed "down and out."

But how does this concern us as followers of Christ? Are we responsible? "Am I my brother's keeper?" Surely. This is our high calling; to seek and to save

the lost, to rescue the perishing, to do good as we have opportunity unto all men.

The second man on the highway is the Clergyman. Here he comes. "And by chance there came down a certain priest that way." He probably had an appointment to preach in the Temple and if so, after the manner of preachers, he was doubtless meditating on what he should say.

"And when he saw the wounded traveller, he passed by on the other side." The word "saw" indicates a passing glance. Had it suited his convenience he would no doubt have ministered to the necessity of this man; but the sound of a ramshorn in the distance reminded him that he must make haste to keep his appointment.

To his mind the sermon was the important thing. It should have occurred to him that a sermon is like a homeopathic pellet, which is ineffective unless dipped in the mother-tincture. The mother-tincture of preaching is love; as it is written, "Love is the fulfilling of the Law."

The third man is the Elder. "A Levite likewise, when he was at the place, came and looked on the wounded man and passed by on the other side."

The word "looked" indicates more than a passing glance. He turned his gaze intently on the wounded man and was inclined to help him. But he also was in haste to reach Jerusalem for an assignment. As one of the Levites, midway between the priesthood and the people, it was his business to look after the rites and ceremonies. It may be that he was charged on this particular day with the kindling of the lights of the golden candlestick. He probably said in his heart,

"I'm sorry for this poor fellow; but if I touch him as he lies weltering in blood I shall be defiled for the Temple service." And when the sound of the distant ramshorn fell upon his ear that settled it. He must hurry on.

He should have remembered however that the prime business of the ministry is to minister. There is nothing more important for the eldership and the diaconate in our Christian churches than to heed the cry of the unfortunate; and the air is vibrant with that cry. It sounds louder even than the ringing of the church bell.

The fourth man is the Outsider: as it is written, "A certain Samaritan as he journeyed, when he saw the man, had compassion on him and bound up his wounds and brought him to an inn and took care of him."

The Jews "had no dealing with the Samaritans." They did not recognize them as belonging to the household of faith. At the time of the Babylonish captivity those who were left behind intermarried with the Assyrians who had been brought in to occupy the land; and the result was a race of half-breeds who were looked down on. At the time of the Restoration they were not allowed to lend a hand in the rebuilding of the Temple; not because they did not have the same Bible or worship the same God, but because they did not belong to "the established church." They were regarded as "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise." Such hide-bound sectarianism is not wholly unknown in our time. Nevertheless it would appear that this Samaritan was a truer son of Israel than either the

Priest or the Levite, because his heart beat responsive to the divine love for all the children of men.

He not only "saw" the wounded traveller and "looked" on him but he "had compassion upon him": and his was the practical sort of compassion which takes the definite form of helpfulness. He put the wounded traveller on his beast of burden and carried him to an inn where, having paid the reckoning, he said to the landlord, "Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee." By this it would appear that his credit was good; which is what we should expect: for a true philanthropist is not only generous but just; he is always an honest man.

So much for the "parable." Its practical point is in the closing words, "Go thou and do likewise." There are four reasons why we should follow this injunction:

First, because we belong to a universal fellowship, in which the welfare of one should be the interest of all. By virtue of our common birth we are under bonds to minister to all sorts and conditions of men. It matters not whether they are, as we say, deserving or undeserving; when they suffer they have a natural claim upon us.

In all the world there is none beyond the possibility of restoration. On the shield of the Humane Society of London is the picture of a child bending over a dying fire and breathing upon it: and above this are the words, *Forsitan scintilla*, "There is perhaps a lingering spark." No soul is irretrievably lost until the great doors of the outer darkness have closed behind him. While there is life, there is hope. The drabs

and drunkards, the thieves and ne'er-do-wells who jostle us in the thronged streets, all have in them a lingering spark which may be quickened into life.

“Down in the human heart,
Crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart,
Wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.”

The *second* reason for this sort of ministry lies in the fact that we profess to be followers of Christ. He was no respecter of persons. As he travelled along the Bloody Way he ministered to all who had been waylaid and robbed. Thieves and magdalenes were not ruled out. In this he was distinctly at odds with the Jews, whose only neighbours were their fellow Jews; and equally with the Greeks, in whose philosophy all but themselves were characterized as “barbarians.” Their conception of neighbourliness was indicated in the concentric circles of Hierocles. The innermost of these circles was for self, that is, “Look out for number one”; the next larger was for one’s household, that is, “God bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more”; the next was for the people of Athens; the next for the citizens of Greece; and, if anything was left over the outside world might have it.

But this is not according to the Gospel of Christ. Here we have a new definition of the word “neighbour.” It does not mean *nachbar*, that is, the man who lives next door. Our neighbour is not the “near dweller”; he may be a dweller at the antipodes. *Our neighbour is the man who needs us.*

And never was there a better exemplification of this definition than in the life of Christ himself. He was neighbour to every man. He touched the leper, he relieved the frenzied demoniac, he cheered the troubled soul of an abandoned woman with the hope of better things. There was healing in the hem of his garment, there was comfort in the kindly glance of his eye. He has been painted by the great masters with a halo encircling his head and hands crossed over a bleeding heart; but what if some artist could have caught the gracious look upon his face as he passed through the porches of Bethesda, laying a gentle hand upon the suffering and speaking a helpful word to all!

His church is a benevolent society. Its name *ecclesia* is significant of its vocation. It is "called out" of the world to uplift the fallen. No other association on earth has a like commission. The State, if true to its function, puts up lights along the windings of the Bloody Way and, so far forth, furnishes safeguards for its travellers; but it does not undertake to transform character or restore to spiritual life those who are dead in their sins. This is the business of the Christian church; and only such as are in cordial sympathy with the philanthropic Gospel of Christ can properly belong to it.

The *third* reason for engaging in this gracious service is that it qualifies us for Heaven. The redeemed up yonder are not wholly engaged in singing praises and playing on golden harps. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister?" Wherefore, blessed are they who so serve their apprenticeship here and now that, when translated to glory, they

may know how to minister in the name and after the manner of God's beloved Son.

A man wearing the uniform of the Salvation Army was passing along one of our streets on a winter night, twelve years ago, when he saw a forlorn fellow, ill-clad and far spent with hunger. He led him to the nearest barracks of the Salvation Army and saw that he was properly cared for. It turned out subsequently that this man was an ex-President of Nicaragua, who had been waylaid and robbed on the Bloody Way. He soon disappeared; but here is the sequel. Two years ago his helper, now a Major in the Salvation Army, was ordered by Commander Booth to proceed to Belgium and superintend the distribution of the relief funds which had been collected for the unfortunate people there. But, notwithstanding his passports, he found it impossible to reach his destination. He was detained here and there for many weeks and, on reaching the boundaries of Germany, he was held up as an English spy. At this juncture the editor of a Spanish newspaper in Berlin happened to hear of his case and, by personal intercession with the Kaiser, secured for him an exceptional permit which enabled him to enter Belgium and carry on his relief work. It turned out that this influential friend was none other than the Nicaraguan who had so long been lost sight of. Thus does bread cast upon the waters return to us again after many days: and thus do "little deeds of kindness" pave the way for larger deeds of kindness further on.

The benevolent tasks of heaven are for those who have familiarized themselves with beneficence in this present life. "Then shall the King say, 'Come, ye

blessed of my father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered and ye gave me meat, I was a stranger and ye took me in, I was sick and in prison and ye visited me. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

There is a *fourth* reason why we should engage in this neighbourly service, namely, because it safeguards the Bloody Way for other travellers. It is thus that we make our world a better world to live in. All our policemen would presently be off duty if well-disposed people would only practise their kindly thoughts. Let us here remember the inspired definition of religion, which is "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

In order to keep oneself unspotted from the world one must needs accept Christ as his Saviour, whose blood alone cleanseth from all sin. That done, nothing remains but to translate his piety into generous deeds.

Come then, my friends, while we pursue the journey of life let us, as true followers of Christ, be neighbours to all.

XII

“LOVE YOUR ENEMIES”

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven. For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.

For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”—MATT. 5: 43-48.

WHO is this that presumes to lift his voice against the teaching of “them of old time?”

Behold a man in homespun challenging the wisdom of the world and the centuries!

This “I say unto you,” intimates either infinite presumption or divine authority. Which shall it be?

In the logic of history it appears that these words of the unaccountable Man not only went crashing like a thunderbolt through the corridors of the past but have come down along the passing centuries like the rising of a sun that is likely to keep on shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

Who is this that presumes to formulate new policies for nations and a new rule of action for all the children of men?

The conclusion is inevitable. He was either the most grotesque charlatan that ever aimlessly beat the air, or else he was what he claimed to be, namely, the sovereign Son of God.

There is no middle ground to stand on.

But who had ever said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy”? You will not find it in the Old Testament, which was the Bible of the Jews. In the Levitical Law it is written, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”; but we must search elsewhere for the addendum, “Thou shalt hate thine enemy.”

The greatest day of the year in Israel—the Day of Atonement—was set apart for the healing of grudges, the forgiveness of injuries and the right adjustment of all mutual relations in the interest of peace. It is only among the *toldoth* or “traditions of the elders”—with which Jesus says the Scribes and Pharisees had “made the Law to be of none effect”—that we shall find any suggestion of personal hatred toward those who have wronged us.

This, however, is the teaching of the world. Not only barbarous tribes but even the most civilized of non-Christian nations have been and are ruled by the *lex talionis*, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth and burning for burning.”

In the golden age of learning in Greece, “mother of arts and eloquence,” a magnificent statue of Nemesis the goddess of vengeance, was erected by the Athenians in the very midst of their philosophic schools. The

resentment of personal slights and the avenging of personal wrongs was regarded as a matter of course.

It is recorded that when Tamerlane led an army of a hundred thousand men to reduce the city of Bagdad which had offended him, he gave orders that no man should return from the final charge without the trophy of a human head; and his victory was commemorated by a pyramid of skulls.

Not long ago Bagdad was again besieged and taken by the entente allies; but no such pyramid was reared beneath its walls. Why not? Because of something that happened nineteen hundred years ago.

We have reason to lament a thousand deeds of frightfulness in the warfare of our time; but roll them all together and the record of a single day of Nero or Caligula will force the conclusion that the Gospel of Christ has brought in a better order of things.

He taught us to "love our enemies."

It is easy enough to love one's friends: but to love those who are bitter against us, there's the rub. Yet this is imperative for those who follow Christ.

We may not be able to like them; indeed we are under bonds not to look with approval on the unworthy; but to love them is quite another thing.

It may be necessary in the interest of the public good that they should be stood up blindfolded against a wall and put out of the way; but with that, in our private capacity, we have nothing to do.

He taught us to "bless them that curse us." Behind that blessing always lies forgiveness; and with forgiveness goes forgetfulness of personal wrongs.

To say "I can forgive but not forget" is to betray

an utter insincerity. There is no room for a grudging pardon in the teaching of Christ. And Peter said, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Till seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say unto you, not until seven times but until seventy times seven!” That is, we are to forgive and forget, without reserve and to the very end.

He taught us to “do good to them that hate us.”

These words are amplified by Paul where he says, “if thine enemy hunger feed him; if he thirst give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.” This is a literal quotation from the Proverbs of Solomon which were written a thousand years before the beginning of the Christian era (Proverbs 15:20). In the reference to “coals of fire” there is no suggestion of personal revenge but rather of good will: for there is no discipline like the grace of forgiveness, which burns like purifying fire to bring one’s enemy to repentance and a better mind.

He taught us to “pray for them that despitefully use us.” If one can pray for his enemy, all else goes with it. How can a man intercede for one at the throne of heavenly grace and feel unkindly toward him?

In the time of our Revolutionary War an old Quaker named Miller was persistently wronged by one of his Tory neighbours. It chanced that this man was presently arrested as a spy and condemned to death. The Quaker thereupon made his way to Washington’s headquarters and interceded for him. The General said, “I should be glad, in view of your loyal services, to do anything within reason for your friend, but—” Just there the Quaker interrupted him: “He

is not my friend; but I am his. He has inflicted grave injuries upon me; but I am a Christian. I have been praying for him; and therefore I entreat you to spare him."

This is "the mind that was in Christ Jesus"; and the mind that was in Christ Jesus must also be in those who profess to follow him.

But what becomes of justice in this case? If all wrongs are forgiven would not our social fabric be at loose ends? Not at all. Justice must be administered, but not by you or me.

This is a divine prerogative. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay." Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. A day is appointed when all the obvious inequalities in human affairs shall be finally righted: and the hand that holds the scales will hold them so evenly that in all the universe, even among those who pass into outer darkness, there will be no complaint. All will unite then in paying tribute to the even-handed justice of God.

In the meantime the administration of justice is committed to Magistrates as the "powers that be." It is for this that they are "ordained of God."

The imprecatory Psalms are in evidence, and such other portions of Scripture as call down vengeance upon the unrighteous. It was in their magisterial capacity that the inspired writers indicated with approval the exact justice which is certain to be administered upon all who impiously run upon the bosses of the divine shield.

If the avengement of wrongs were a personal matter what room would there be for the magisterial office or for courts of justice?

It is true, as Hamlet says, that “in the corrupted currents of the world, Offense’s guilty hand doth often shove by justice”; nevertheless it remains that, in the interest of social order, personal retribution must yield to official arbitrament. Yet even here love is not ruled out. A magistrate may be constrained for the general good to send a culprit to the electric chair; but in his personal capacity he may and should feel kindly towards him.

The judge who, in 1849, passed sentence of death on Professor Webster for a sanguinary crime did so with tears running down his cheeks: “You and I were classmates,” he said, “but the law must have its course!”

A nation like ours may be forced, in the interest of humanity and the world’s welfare, to engage in war: but that does not mean that our armies on the march should keep step to the grim music of the Hymn of Hate.

It is recorded that President Lincoln when looking over the bloody field of Gettysburg said in a broken voice, “This is awful—awful,—but it must go on!”

A soldier on the thin red line may, in the line of military duty and for the putting down of evils which menace the public welfare, aim a deadly shot at his adversary without ceasing to love him.

So far as we are individually concerned, however, love and not justice must control us. What do we know about justice anyway? Can we discern the motives which lie back of the actions of men? “Who knows the heart, ’tis he alone decidedly can try us.”

We always fail when we undertake to administer

justice for the vindication of our personal rights; but we make no failures in dispensing love.

Not long ago I had occasion to go into a delicatessen store where the German proprietor, after waiting on me asked if I remembered how cheerful his wife was when I last saw her. "She now lies," he added, "in the Lutheran churchyard. A few days after you were here she suddenly lost her mind and became so violent that we had to take her to the hospital; and now she's gone: and I and my three children are very, very lonely without her." When I asked how she happened to lose her mind he replied that it was brooding on the war and on the loss of former friends who turned their backs upon her.

Alas, how true it is that "man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn!" And by that fact it becomes more and more obvious that, so far as we personally are concerned, "love is the fulfilling of the law."

This rule of action was not emphasized by our Lord without his giving good and sufficient reasons for it. Observe how he placed the approval of the Triune God behind it.

First: "So shall ye be the children of your Father which is in Heaven." In the distribution of the gifts of Providence there is no respect of persons. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and upon the unjust." All alike are sinners, yet all alike are beneficiaries of his bounty. Even the most malignant infidel is permitted to bask in his sunlight and breathe his air. Thus God is Love; and he that loveth not, in like manner, is not born of God.

Second: It is thus that we vindicate our calling as disciples of Christ. It matters not whether he be accepted or rejected, he “tasted death for every man.” His followers are called “a peculiar people” because they try to be like him.

This is implied in the words “If ye love them that love you what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?” By this it would appear that Christians are expected to do “more than others.” And this “more” is specified in the ministry of love.

Christ himself, in his capacity as a man among men, declined to administer justice. He said, “The Son of Man is come not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.”

On one occasion the Rabbis dragged an adulterous woman up the marble steps of the Temple and threw her before him saying, “Moses in the Law commanded that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou?” He stooped and wrote on the dust of the pavement, “Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone at her.” When they had gone out “one by one, beginning at the eldest,” he asked of the woman “Hath no man condemned thee?” She answered “Nay, Lord.” Then said he “Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more!” This does not mean that he condoned her offence; only that his earthly ministry was not magisterial. And in thus speaking he marked out a definite rule of action for all who profess to follow him.

Third: In the ministry of love we are led by the Holy Spirit along the pathway of sanctification to the fulness of character. This is intimated in the

words, "Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

It is true that we cannot attain to the absolute perfection of our divine Father; but under the influence of the sanctifying Spirit we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ so as ultimately to reach the perfection of love; and, so far forth, we shall be like him.

For a life thus lived in "labour of love and patience of hope" there is a great reward even here and now. Love is indeed its own reward. There is no warming of the heart like that which Cowper calls "the generous pleasure of a kindly deed." Let Portia speak:

"The quality of mercy is not strained:
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

But there is another sort of reward awaiting us at the Great Day. Our Lord said, "Judge not that ye be not judged; for with what measure ye mete it shall be measured unto you again." We never offer the Lord's Prayer without saying "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." In that little word "as" we call God to witness that we ask no better treatment at his hands than we are now according to those who trespass against us. This is our plea; "The mercy I to others show, that mercy show to me!"

And there is still another consideration for all who desire to make their lives tell for the betterment of things; namely, that by this ministry of love we enter

into co-operation with God himself in the bringing in of the Golden Age. Our deeds of kindness are the “coals of fire” which are destined to burn out all those personal animosities which provoke wars and rumours of war.

It is for us to say when the Prince of Peace shall come. Let private vengeance cease and never more will red beacons blaze upon the headlands of the earth. When every Peter puts up his sword into its sheath, the swords of all nations will be beaten into ploughshares and the Hymn of Hate will give way to the Old Hundredth.

Welcome the Truce of God! Welcome the Parliament of Man! Welcome the day when the world shall give back the song which now the angels sing, “Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and good will to men!”

XIII

THE PRIMACY OF PETER

"I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."—MATT. 16: 18-19.

YOU are aware, of course, that this text is "fighting ground"; but I am not in a belligerent mood. My purpose is purely exegetical; that is, to expound this Scripture without bias and in such manner as to arrive at a clear understanding of it.

There are three questions here requiring our attention; namely as to the meaning of the rock, the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the power of binding and loosing.

First, then, as to the meaning of the Rock.

In this connection there are two Greek words to be considered, one of these, *petra*, is feminine; the other, *petros*, is masculine; and they are never synonymous or interchangeable.* The former is used with reference to the foundation of the church: "On this rock will I build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The other occurs in the saying,

* "There is no example in good authors of *petra* in the significance of *petros*,"—*Liddell and Scott*.

"Thou art Peter," where Jesus confers a new name on the apostle who had just witnessed for him.

In order to a clear understanding of the relation of these two words in the passage under the consideration we must recall the circumstances. Our Lord was on his last journey to Jerusalem, that memorable journey of which it is written, "He set his face steadfastly to go." The shadow of the Cross was over him, but he did not swerve a hair's breadth from the path which had been marked out for him. He was a lonely Man, with a great secret in his breast which, thus far, he had not been able to confide to those who followed him. It was necessary that they should know him better before they would be "able to bear it."

As they journeyed he asked of his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" They answered that some said one thing and some another.—"But who say ye that I am?"—Then Peter, with a ringing voice, witnessed his good confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!"

This was a pronouncement far beyond any that had been previously made; and to the divine Man, longing for sympathy in his great redemptive purpose, it must have been as grateful as a cup of cold water to thirsty lips. Wherefore he said, "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jonas; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

Then followed the giving of the new name, "Thou art *Petros*; and on this *petra* will I build my church."

From these facts we draw two conclusions: One is that the Church is built upon the proposition laid down by Peter, that is, *the Supremacy of Jesus as the long-looked-for Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Here is a solid ledge of rock on which the structure which it was proposed to build could securely rest, and upon which, as an historical fact, the Church has stood through all the centuries so firmly that the gates of hell have not prevailed against it.

No other interpretation of this passage is consistent with the indisputable claim of our Lord's supremacy, as where it is written, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

The other conclusion is that the new name which was given to Simon the son of Jonas was eminently appropriate, by reason of the fact that he was the pioneer of the disciples in announcing this mighty truth. Inasmuch as his confession was the Rock on which the church was to rest, as on a sure foundation, he might well receive honour as a stone hewn out of that rock.

It is precisely as Scipio for his eastern conquests was surnamed "Africanus"; and as Balboa, who first from the peak in Darien gazed out upon the western sea was thenceforth known as "Pacificus."

All honour to the disciple who was thus crowned with a well-earned "primacy" for his announcement of the fundamental truth of Christ's sole pre-eminence as the Rock of Ages!

Not long after the crucifixion, when Peter was called before the Sanhedrin to answer for the healing of the cripple at the Gate Beautiful, he disavowed all personal power in the miracle, saying, "Be it known unto you that by the name of Jesus Christ whom ye have crucified, even by him was this man healed. *This is the stone*, set at nought by you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salva-

tion in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

This surely does not look as if Peter regarded himself as the rock-foundation of the church.

A quarter of a century later, in a letter written by Peter to his fellow-Christians he says, "Ye also as living stones, are built up into a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up acceptable sacrifices by Jesus Christ"; by which he gives us to understand, that the honour which was conferred upon him is in a measure extended to all who truly accept Christ as the foundation not only of the Church, but of their personal faith, as living members of it.

Second, as to "the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

The question here is, what are we to understand by "the kingdom of heaven"?

The phrase has a double meaning. It is sometimes used to designate the Church triumphant; that is, the great assembly of the redeemed in heaven: as where Christ says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"; and again, "They shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

In this case, however, the doors are "opened and shut" by Christ alone.

In the vision of the Golden Candlestick he is seen with the keys at his girdle.

In his own announcement of the Great Day he represents himself as standing at heaven's gate and saying, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

In the gathering of the "great multitude which no

man can number," all with one accord ascribe their entrance into heaven to the washing of their robes in the blood of the lamb; "*therefore* are they before the throne of God."

But the phrase "the kingdom of heaven" is more frequently applied to the Church militant; that is, to the kingdom of heaven on earth.

This is particularly clear in the parables, as when Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and it gathered of every kind both good and bad." And again, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way."

It is obvious that the reference in such passages is not to the General Assembly of the first born in heaven, but to the imperfect church in which the "tares and wheat must grow together until the great day."

Now which of these meanings is to be taken in the passage before us? Certainly not the first; for it is unthinkable that the Saviour who "openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth" should have abdicated the stewardship of those keys. But to Peter were committed the keys which opened the doors of Israel, the exclusive church of the Old Economy, to all the children of men.

In order to verify this fact let us transport ourselves to an open court in Jerusalem. It is the day of Pentecost. A great company is assembled not of Jews only but of "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Mesopotamia and Cappadocia, Phrygia and

Pamphylia, Cretes and Arabians, strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes." Suddenly there is a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and the disciples begin to speak in divers tongues of the unsearchable riches of Christ. The people are amazed and cry, "What meaneth this?" Others mocking say, "These men are full of new wine." Peter arises; "This is not wine," he says, "but the intoxication of the Spirit! This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel, 'It shall come to pass in the last days that I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.' This is a manifestation of the power of Jesus Christ, whom ye crucified and who is risen from the dead and exalted at the right hand of God!" On hearing this they are pricked to heart and cry, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Now listen to Peter; "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins! *For the promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call!*"

At that moment the keys were turned, and the gates of the Ancient Church were thrown open to all. The Christian Church, as the lineal successor and residuary legatee of Israel has kept open house ever since that day.

If there be any question as to this interpretation of Peter's keys, let his own words settle it. Years afterward in the Christian Council at Jerusalem, we hear him saying, "Men and brethren, ye know how God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the Gospel and believe."

What higher honour could be conferred on any mortal man?

Third, as to the power of "binding and loosing."

In so far as this refers to the administering of discipline in the Church there is no grave difference of opinion; but there is a serious disagreement when it is referred to so-called "absolution." This word is used in two ways.

First, there is "plenary absolution," by which is meant the power to forgive sins: and this is accorded to no man.

The Son of Man alone "hath power on earth to forgive sins." This is his exclusive prerogative, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

But there is also "declarative absolution"; that is, the authority to extend absolution in the name of Christ to all who will repent and believe in him. This authority was conferred upon Peter; but not upon him only.

If evidence on that point is called for, let us visit the upper room on the evening of the resurrection. The disciples are assembled with closed doors "for fear of the Jews." Suddenly Jesus appears in their midst saying, "Peace be unto you! As my Father hath sent me, so send I you." Then breathing on them he continues, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.*"

By this it appears that whatever power of absolution was conferred on Peter was shared by all the disciples who were associated with him.

And just here we find the gravest item of respon-

sibility in Christian service. As Jesus was sent "to seek and to save the lost" by offering absolution to as many as would repent and believe in him, so has he sent us, even the humblest of his followers, to declare that absolution to all who are sensible of sin and desirous of reconciliation with God.

There are no more solemn words in Scripture than these, "When I say unto the wicked, 'Thou shalt surely die,' and thou givest him not warning nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life; he shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked and he turn not from his wickedness nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul."

In pursuance of that injunction I, here and now, as an ambassador of Christ, offer free and full absolution to as many as are willing to renounce their evil ways and receive him as their Saviour, who alone hath power on earth to forgive sins.

I offer you absolution as Peter did to the multitude at Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."

I offer you absolution as Peter did to the people who thronged about him in Solomon's Porch, "Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out!"

I offer you absolution as Peter did to the arrogant rabbis of the Sanhedrin, "This Jesus is the stone which was set at nought by the builders but is now become the head of the corner; neither is there salvation in any other!"

I offer you absolution as Peter did to the Gentiles

at Cæsarea, "To Jesus Christ as Lord of all bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

I offer you absolution as Peter does in his General Epistle to all believers, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing that ye know these things, beware lest ye be led into error and fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; to whom be glory both now and forever."

If we are finally received at the gate of heaven it will not be through any merit of our own or by reliance on the supererogation of any other man.

The only countersign there is that of the Crusaders, "In his name!" If it chanced that one of them was pursued by the enemy he rode for his life toward the nearest castle from whose turret floated the red banner of the Cross. Weary and hard bestead he gave the countersign; whereat the portcullis was raised and over the drawbridge he rode into safety. Herein is a parable of life.

We are always fleeing from the foe and finding sanctuary only in the shadow of the Cross; and at our journey's end we enter heaven through him who gave himself for us.

His is the welcome, "Enter into the joy of thy Lord!"

And his shall be the glory forever, as it is written, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour and blessing forever and ever, amen!"

XIV

CHILDREN IN THE MARKETPLACE

"And Jesus said 'Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets and calling to their fellows and saying; "We have piped unto you and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented." For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say "He hath a devil." The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, "Behold a man gluttonous and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." But wisdom is justified of her children.'"—MATT. 11: 16-19.

AT this time John the Baptist was a prisoner in the Castle of Machaerus. He had gone up and down as the forerunner of Jesus proclaiming, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand! There cometh one after me whose shoes' latchet I am unworthy to unloose!"

And now Jesus was at the height of his popularity, while his pursuivant was immured in a dungeon. Was it strange that the eye of the caged eagle should be dimmed? If Jesus was indeed the Messiah how could he thus forget his friend in adversity?

Two of John's disciples were sent accordingly to ask, "Art thou he should come, or look we for another?" They found him in Solomon's Porch with the multitude gathered about him.

In answer to their question he bade them stand aside and see what they should see. He then continued his preaching and his miracles of healing. "Go

now," he said, "and tell John the things which ye have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And say unto him, Blessed is he that shall not be offended in me."

Then, having dismissed the messengers, he turned his attention to the faultfinders who were nearby.

After paying a splendid tribute to John as "the greatest born of woman," he continued: "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like a group of children at play in the market, acting now a mock marriage and again a mock funeral, and complaining that their fellows will not participate in the games; 'We have piped unto you for a wedding and ye refuse to dance; we have mourned unto you for a funeral and you will not lament with us.'"

Here is an intimation of the folly of trying to please the faultfinders. He concludes with these words: "Wisdom is justified of her children": that is, an unbiased mind is always open to the truth, so as to perceive the reason and rightness of things.

It is a queer world that we are living in.

The one constant factor in history is human nature. One generation passes away and another takes its place with the regularity of the ebbing and flowing tides: but the calm current of heredity flows on. The children of this generation are not unlike the children of other generations.

I once sat on a broken pedestal in the Roman Forum and studied a strange geometrical figure which had been rudely cut on the marble pavement. A passing Italian explained it by saying that the children

of ancient Rome used to play here and this was one of their games. Then I remembered the "hopscotch" of my boyhood; how we used exactly such a diagram, hopping from one section to another and pushing a pebble before us.

Verily, as Solomon said, "There is no new thing under the sun."

And by the same token the faultfinders are still with us, and always complaining of their fellows in the old-fashioned way.

I. It is obvious, at the outset, that Christ himself is no more acceptable to his censorious critics than he was so long ago. There are many who see in him "no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty that they should desire him." They find in him four particular grounds of offence.

The first is his singular birth. "Great is the mystery of godliness, God is manifest in flesh!" Is it possible that divinity and humanity could be thus interwoven, as warp and woof, in the person of a child lying in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes? They cannot believe it.

The second is his unaccountable life. Never man lived like this man! His challenge was, "Who layeth anything to my charge?" It is claimed for him that in a world of sinners he alone, as the Nonesuch Professor says, "brought the bottom of his life up to the top of his light." Is this credible? The faultfinders decline to believe it.

The third is his vicarious death. All others are born alone, live and suffer and toil alone, and must pass all alone through the little wicket gate. But if the claim of Jesus be allowed he "tasted death for

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every man." The burden of the world's sin was upon him until his great heart broke under it. But how could the innocent suffer for the guilty in that way? So it comes to pass that the cross is "to the Jew a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness," while to them that believe it is the very wisdom and power of God.

The fourth of the offences is the resurrection of Christ. It is claimed that by virtue of his indwelling power, as the self-existent source and centre of life, he triumphed over death and ascended up on high, taking captivity captive and bringing life and immortality to light. But this is against the analogy of all human experience. "It is an hard saying; who can receive it?"

No doubt these are all mysteries; but shall they be rejected on that account? The most irrational man in the world is he who refuses to believe in what he cannot understand. We are enveloped by mysteries which we accept without a murmur because they are indubitable facts.

Not all the scientists and philosophers in the world can explain the influence of mind over matter, or even the beating of my pulse or how I lift my hand at the command of my will. The question is not whether things are comprehensible, but whether they are facts or not; and that must always be determined by the evidence in the case.

The reason why the four wonderful facts which centre in Christ are rejected is not because they are mysterious, nor because they are not sustained by adequate evidence, but because they lead to conclusions which are repellent to the carnal mind.

If Christ was born and lived and died and rose again as claimed, then he "showed himself with power" to be the veritable Son of God: in which event he is able to save unto the uttermost all who will come unto him.

This is the *quod erat demonstrandum* which lies back of all the thousands of excuses which are offered for rejecting Christ.

The faultfinders do not object to being reconciled with God but they decline to be saved that way. And this is because "the carnal mind is enmity against God."

It remains, therefore, as true as ever that, whether the music of the Gospel be a dirge over the sinfulness of sin or a jubilate on the way to a marriage feast, the children in the marketplace decline to keep step with it.

But Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever; and the faultfinders cannot dispose of him.

It is related that when John Huss was awaiting his execution he covered the walls of his prison with the theological propositions in defence of which he had ventured his life. He dreamed one night that a troop of black devils entered his cell and obliterated them all; and that afterward an angel came and wrote the name of Jesus in colours of blood and fire, saying as he vanished, "Let them efface that if they can!"

It is true that, whatever may befall our interpretations of the Gospel, the unaccountable Man can never be bowed out of court. His glory brightens with every rising sun. "All ages," as the infidel Renan said, "will call him blessed; and future generations will

proclaim that none has ever been born greater than Jesus among the children of men."

II. But if Christ was not immune from criticism is it at all surprising that his disciples should suffer in the same way?

Did he not say, "The servant is not greater than his lord; if they have been offended in me shall they not also be offended in you?"

And unfortunately there are serious grounds of offence in us. The church is made up of all sorts and conditions of people, having the common infirmities of the race; so that all alike must say, "I am not what I ought to be, nor what I would like to be, nor yet what I hope to be; but by the grace of God I am what I am!"

One ground of offence is found in their seriousness.

In the process of repentance they have come to realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Men all about them are going to Judgment, lockstep, quickstep, unprepared and laughing as they go. Such facts as this should make us serious. But the people in Vanity Fair do not like the slow measures of our *miserere*. They would have us dance to their piping as we pass on.

No more are they pleased with our hallelujahs.

We sing because our hearts are light. Our sins which were as scarlet are made whiter than snow, washed away by the red fountain drawn from Immanuel's veins. How can we keep step to the Dead March in Saul when the mislived past is blotted out and heaven's gates are open before us?

But what matters it? Whether we laugh or weep,

it is all one; we cannot please those who are disposed to find fault with us.

Then they remind us of our loud profession: and just here is where they totally misunderstand us.

We do not profess to be saints. There is not one saint in the universal church: "for there is no difference; all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The only difference is that while we acknowledge ourselves to be sinners we profess to be sinners *saved by grace*. We have accepted the divine overtures of mercy in Christ and, not for any personal merit but only for the righteousness which is by faith in him, we look for everlasting life.

But they ask, "What are you doing to exemplify your faith? To be sure you are sending the Gospel to Borria-boola-gha; but charity begins at home. Why do you not feed the hungry and clothe the naked and show some practical interest in the destitute who are all around us?"

Behold, how small an argument will put them down! Here is a little book called the "Charities Directory of the City of New York," in which there are above two thousand organized forms of public beneficence. How many of these are being carried on by those who hold themselves aloof from religious organizations? Not as many as can be counted on the fingers of a dozen hands!

It is respectfully submitted that before our critics are fully qualified they should be able to show that they themselves are doing a little "charity at home."

The Red Cross also is in evidence. It is the religious women of our country who are doing practically all that is being done for the men on the firing line.

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The symbol on the flag that floats over them is a tribute of praise to the charitable work of the church and an unanswerable reproach to those who oppose it.

The Church is confessedly not what it ought to be; but it is doing so much, not only for the relief of the needy at home, but for the evangelization of the regions beyond, that its censorious critics have abundant reason to lay their hands upon their lips.

The followers of Christ are banded together like the ancient phalanx of the Spartans, who marched shoulder to shoulder, with shields overlapped, pushing their way to victory, while bearing the wounded aloft upon their shields. The joints of their harness are pierced by many a well-aimed arrow; but they push on, carrying the weak and wounded with them, in the confident hope of standing together some day in the refuge of the Holy City.

III. It is time, however, to turn the tables upon the faultfinders. And frankness on our part is surely warranted by the frankness with which they are wont to criticize us.

We venture, therefore, to call to their remembrance the great professions which they make.

Oh! but they say, "We make no profession." Let us see.

The followers of Christ do not profess to be good people but only trying to do good; and because they find it no easy matter they not only invoke the divine help but band themselves together for mutual prayer and sympathy. But how is it with these others? They profess such confidence in themselves that they need no such fellowship. They need no God, no Saviour, no Bible and no church. The reason why they do not

pray is because they can get along without it. A great profession this; and what have they to show for it?

Their practice is out of gear. Their profession is like sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. The very criticisms which they pass upon the church are in evidence against them.

Why is it that ever and anon there are flaming headlines in the newspapers like this, "*Another Deacon gone wrong*"? Is it not because Deacons are expected to go right?

Tell me why the newspapers never fling out this headline? "*Another infidel gone wrong!*" It is because in the world's opinion, that would be no extraordinary thing. The average reporter is looking for something sensational and therefore he would not take the trouble to make a note of it.

What an inadvertent tribute is thus paid to Christian character; and what a serious reflection upon the average character of those who oppose it!

In this connection let me remind you of Apollodorus, the Athenian artist who invented the mixing of colours and the blending of lights and shadows. His sketches were so imperfect and experimental that over each of them he wrote his apology in these words:

"Tis no hard thing to reprehend me;
But let the men that blame me, mend me."

It is no easy matter to live a consistent Christian life. It means hard wrestling day by day to get the better of one's meaner self, and an unceasing effort to converge one's energies upon the betterment of the world for the glory of God.

“Hard pounding, gentlemen,” as Wellington said at Waterloo. If you do not believe it, my friend, come into our fellowship and try it. Or if you still prefer to stand aloof, then “let him that blames us, mend us.”

It is thus that “Wisdom is justified of her children.”

The best we can do is to do our best and turn a deaf ear to the faultfinders. For to our own Master we stand or fall.

Wherefore “not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ,” let us strive to please him.

We may not count ourselves to have apprehended, as though we were already perfect; but this one thing we can do, we can “reach forth unto the things which are before and press toward the mark for the prize of of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

We shall all alike have to plead guilty in the Great Day: but blessed are those who, leaning on him as Saviour and Intercessor, shall at length be delivered from the shame and power and penalty of sin.

In the meantime the Gospel must in all fairness be judged not by the character of Christians but by that of Christ himself. Whatever may be our imperfections, he stands forth, as once he stood at Gabbatha, challenging the world to criticize him.

Two infidels once sat in a railway car discussing his wonderful life. One of them said, “I think an interesting romance could be written about him.” The other replied, “And you are just the man to write it. Set forth the correct view of his life and character. Tear down the prevailing sentiment as to his

divineness and paint him as he was—a man among men.” The suggestion was acted on and the romance was written. The man who made the suggestion was Colonel Ingersoll: the author was General Lew Wallace; and the book was “Ben-Hur.” In the process of constructing it he found himself facing the unaccountable Man. The more he studied his life and character the more profoundly he was convinced that he was more than a man among men; until at length like the centurion under the Cross, he was constrained to cry, “Verily, this was the Son of God.”

If these words should, perchance, fall under the eyes of any honest doubter let him go and do likewise. For no man can frankly look into the eyes of Jesus without believing in him. If all other miracles were disposed of, Christ would still remain the greatest miracle of all.

“Reach hither thy finger,” said Jesus, “and thrust it into my wounds”; and doubting Thomas fell before him—as every other honest doubter must do—with the adoring cry “My Lord and my God!”

XV

'A CLINIC IN TYRE

"And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into a house, and would have no man know it; but he could not be hid.

For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet:

The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.

But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.

And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs.

And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.

And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed."—MARK 7: 24-30.

OUR Lord was everybody's friend. Jew and Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free were all alike to him. He was no narrow-minded provincial, but a cosmopolitan Saviour with a Gospel for all sorts and conditions of men.

But his disciples were of a different mind. They had been trained in the school of Jewish prejudice and were as narrow as he was broad. He was like the sun which shines for all; but they were like twelve

candles set in a row, their light shining in such a small circle that a bushel could easily hide it.

If they were ever to be of any particular use in a kingdom of universal love they must somehow be inoculated with the mind of the Master. But how should this be brought to pass?

Here was the problem that confronted Jesus when he set out on his journey toward the North. So long as he remained in Jerusalem the Twelve were quite willing to co-operate with him, provided too much of his time was not devoted to the betterment of "the devil's poor"; but when he crossed over into Samaria, the land of the half-breeds, they were reluctant to follow him. Once when they found him talking at high noon with a woman of ill repute they were amazed beyond measure, for "the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans." And when he pressed on still further into "the regions beyond," where there were none but Gentiles, who were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise," they sympathetically and practically parted company with him.

On reaching his destination in the North Country, being wearied with his journey, he "entered into a certain house and would have no man know it." But it is written, "he could not be hid." What a tribute to his reputation! It was as when a cargo of spices from the West Indies comes into port and the pungent odour of spicery pervades the atmosphere all along the river-front. The fame of the wonder-worker had gone before him. The people of the village were on the *qui vive* to see and hear him.

The first of his visitors was a woman with an aching

heart. She had a wayward daughter who was "possessed of an unclean spirit." In vain was human help; but having heard of the arrival of Jesus she came with her trouble to him.

Just here is where Jesus began to teach his disciples the lesson of magnanimity. It calls to remembrance a clinic which I attended in the New York Hospital many years ago. The patient was a little fellow who was suffering from hip-disease. He lay upon the operating-table where the surgeon kept him waiting while, with uplifted scalpel, he instructed a class of medical students who were gathered about him. So the Good Physician kept this sore-hearted woman waiting while he taught his disciples how to deal with cases like hers.

"She fell at his feet and told him all." It was the old, old story of a skeleton in the closet of an otherwise happy home: the story of a daughter grown impatient of parental restraint, falling into bad company, allured by temptation and so fallen that the whole household was scandalized by the shame of it.

Could Jesus help her? Surely; for nothing was too hard for him. But would he? Never in all his ministry had he refused a request like hers. Wherever he went the sick were brought out on couches along the way and the record is that "he healed them all."

Nevertheless in this case "he answered not a word." How unlike him! Had he nothing to say? Presently he would have something to say; but not until this eloquent silence should be rightly interpreted by his disciples, to whom it makes this dumb appeal, "*What would you do in a case like this?*" He has changed places with them for the nonce and is lending himself

to their narrow prejudice that he may expose it. He is silent because they would have it so.

But the woman persists "Lord, pity me!" And surely he will pity her; for it is written of him "He is very pitiful," that is full of pity, and "his compassions fail not."

Not so his disciples. They cry, "Send her away, Lord, she troubleth us!" The sight of distress which their sectarian bigotry must decline to relieve is naturally an annoyance to them. There is nothing in the world so troublesome as the sympathy which finds no outlet in kindness: and unfortunately, this is one of the common ills that human frailty is heir to.

But the clinic goes on. The Lord, for the business in hand, still occupies the standpoint of his disciples. "I am not sent," he says, "but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." A strange rebuff to be administered by the gracious Son of God! How shall we reconcile it with those other words, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out"?

And still the woman persists: "Lord have compassion upon us!" Her petition is now duplicated by bringing her wayward daughter into it. But this would only increase the reluctance of the disciples to help her: since, however they might look with compassion on the sorrow of the distressed mother, for her wayward girl they had none. Let her reap what she had sown! Why should drabs and drunkards complain when justice overtakes them?

Again Jesus falls in with their way of thinking. "It is not meet," he says, "to take the children's bread and fling it to dogs." This is like a blow in the face. The disciples are looking at each other as if to say,

"Just as we thought! If there were any of the lost sheep of the house of Israel in this neighbourhood he would gladly minister to them; but never to such as these." For, be it remembered, all Gentiles were regarded as pariahs. The Jews were accustomed to call them "dogs of Gentiles," esteeming them no better than the curs that whine and howl outside the gates of Oriental cities.

But when Christ fell in with this prejudice it was only that he might reprove it. He echoed their thought in order to expose its brutality and put it to an open and perpetual shame.

Let us, however, be chary of reproof at this point lest we be found in a similar case. For, of all of our besetting sins, bigotry is the last that dies. It is like the snakes of our boyhood that, when decapitated, wriggled till the going down of the sun. Witness the mean proverb, "Charity begins at home," which is only another way of saying "Charity never goes abroad." And witness the sectarianism which turns its back on "dissenters" and "non-conformists" with the cry, "The Temple of the Lord are we!"

Was this the mind of Jesus? A thousand times no! It is however the logic of the clinic. It is the irony of infinite goodness rebuking meanness and inhumanity. Not for the world would Christ play needlessly upon the quivering heartstrings of a mother. Never in all his ministry had such words fallen from his lips, nor would they now but for the great purpose in view. The patient is kept waiting in her painful solicitude because the disciples must be taught their lesson; but presently he will abundantly repay her.

Still the woman persists. Mother wit to the rescue!

"Yea, Lord; but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from the master's table."

She has taken him at his word: "Bring forth your strong arguments." And she wins her case.

Thus far Christ has spoken for his disciples: now he speaks for himself; "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee as thou wilt." And straightway she speeds homeward to greet her daughter who, restored to her right mind, is waiting in the doorway to receive her.

So ends the clinic. The disciples have been taught the greatest and most wonderful of lessons: to wit, that Christ is a Saviour for all.

His first word is "Come" and his second word is "Go." He leads the way to the slums, to the frontiers and to the regions beyond, and bids us follow him. City Missions, Home Missions, Foreign Missions, all missions are for us. The word "Go ye out into the highways and hedges and constrain them to come in" has been sounding down along the centuries; and still we "tarry at Jerusalem." Christ would lead the way; but he cannot go without us.

Here then is *our* lesson: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together until now, waiting"—waiting for what?—"for the manifestation of the children of God." That is to say the world is unsaved because we as God's children have not been "manifested" as yet. We have not developed the spirit of loving kindness which alone can save it.

Our Lord has infinite resources at his command; bread enough for the hungry, comfort for the sorrowing and salvation for all who wander in sinful ways: but he works through us as his agents in the dispensa-

tion of his grace. So it comes to pass that the unconverted world is groaning and travailing even *until now*. It is still waiting for an enlargement of the hearts of those who profess to be God's children.

The Twelve were slow to learn their lesson. Not even when they saw the Master with his hands stretched out on Calvary, as if to say "Look unto me all ye ends of the earth, and be ye saved," would they consent that he was "tasting death for every man." He was still a provincial Saviour, the Messiah of the Jews. It was not until eight years after his resurrection that Peter, while engaged in prayer on a housetop in Joppa, saw Heaven open and a great sheet let down in which were all manner of clean and unclean things. When a Voice called, "Rise Peter, kill and eat," he objected, saying, "Not so, Lord: for I have never eaten anything common or unclean." The Voice replied, "What God hath cleansed that call not thou common." But the vision must needs be repeated thrice before this foremost man of the Twelve could rightly interpret it. Then he said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:" and thereafter he, and the other disciples who had previously shared his provincial view of the Gospel, consented that it was not only intended for the lost sheep of the House of Israel but for "all that were afar off."

How strangely are the tables turned; now the prejudice that was once entertained by the Jews against the Gentiles is all the other way. In New York City there are a hundred times as many Jews as in the city of Jerusalem: and they are practically regarded as outside the pale of the Gospel. What is being done to evangelize them? Practically nothing. There are

none so deep in the waters of Christian neglect as these ancient people, once the chosen people of God.

But here is a more startling fact. There are twelve hundred millions of people in the world who have never heard the Gospel at all! They dwell in the regions beyond, in "the regions of darkness and the shadow of death." And the lamentable fact is that there are multitudes of Christian people who refuse to follow Christ across the borders of Galilee! O God, enlarge our hearts! Teach us thy great word whosoever! Give us to understand the long unheeded sign of the Golden Age, that "the Gospel must be first preached throughout the whole world; then shall the end be."

Here is a lesson for non-Christians also; namely that the Gospel is not to be appraised by the inconsistent lives of those who profess to practise it. Is it fair to judge of art or science or philosophy by the blunders that artists and scientists and philosophers are making every day? Is it just to rail at a Republican form of government because of the malfeasance of near-statesmen who administer it? Truth must stand upon its own merits, not upon the achievements of wayward Argonauts who wander hither and yon in quest of the golden fleece.

We take no exception to the criticisms which are passed upon us; but far above and behind us stands One in whom the world can find "no fault at all." Christ alone is the true exemplar of the Christian life. If we are sinful, he is without sin. If we are sectarian, he is cosmopolitan. If we are mean and selfish and narrow minded, he is so magnanimous that, in self-forgetful devotion to the welfare of humanity, he

set his face steadfastly to go toward the Cross and there "tasted death for every man."

And here, finally, is a lesson for all petitioners. The woman of Syrophenicia was one of many. The world is full of mothers who agonize for wayward daughters, and of fathers who stand in their doorways looking off toward the hills and waiting for the return of their prodigal sons. And the Lord is ever waiting to be gracious.

The newspapers tell of the recent death of a woman who twenty years ago at the Battery bade farewell to her sailorman who never came back. Her mind was crazed by hope deferred; so that every morning for these weary years she has gone down to the Battery and shaded her eyes to see if her ship were coming in. Let us hope that she has passed on to a happy reunion with her sailorman. In any case we may rest assured that, however we may be kept waiting for a while, the prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God will never fail us.

In the long days when President Garfield sat on his piazza at Elberon waiting for his last summons and gazing out over the sea, he repeated again and again, "The ships come in!" God's ships *always* come in. Therefore,

"Don't stop praying;
The Lord is nigh:
God has promised,
He'll hear your cry."

He that believeth shall not make haste. The times and seasons are for God; but the great promises are for us. "Ask and ye *shall* receive; seek and ye *shall* find; knock and it *shall* be opened unto you."

XVI

AN INTELLIGIBLE GOD

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. . . . And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.”—JOHN I : 1-5, 14.

JOHAN was under divine orders to write a Biography of Jesus. It was to be bound up with sixty-five other books as an important part of a larger Book which was destined to be known everywhere and all through the centuries as The Word of God.

For this work he was divinely equipped with a gift called *theopneustia*, or “inspiration.” By this we are given to understand that God proposed to safeguard his writing against all possibility of error. In other words, he was to write “as he was moved by the Spirit of God.”

But before he began this Biography there must be a preface or *Prologue* which would explain its purpose. We have this prologue in the first eighteen verses of the Gospel according to John. It might properly be entitled,

HOW A MAN MAY BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH GOD.

We *must* know God: for "this is life eternal, to know God." But how can the finite grasp the Infinite? "No man hath seen God at any time or can see him." Can a child dip up the ocean in a gourd? "Canst thou by searching find out God?"

Let Job answer: "Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. . . . Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him."

We are told of an ancient philosopher named Simonides who was summoned before his king and commanded to formulate a definition of God. At the close of the day he returned and said, "O king, I shall require a week." At the end of the week he came again saying, "I shall require a month." At the end of the month he said, "I shall require a year." And at the end of the year he confessed, "O king, the more I think of him the less I know of him!"

Nevertheless, we *must* know God; for herein lies the secret of eternal life. We came out from him; we shall ultimately return to him; and everything depends on our being right with him.

Moreover, it is morally certain that, being a good God, he will somehow reveal himself to us. Would an earthly father leave his children to wander helplessly

and hopelessly in a barren waste forever? How then should our heavenly Father fail to interpose in our behalf by making himself known to us?

But how can he make himself known to us? How do we become acquainted with each other? The ordinary means of communication between man and man is speech. In this way we are now becoming acquainted with each other. The majority of this congregation I have never seen before today; but you are now being introduced to me, not by this clerical garb nor by my features but by my word. By this you will presently know my way of thinking, my moral convictions, my character and substantially what sort of person I am. In like manner we become acquainted with God. His Word is the index of himself. He speaks and behold, we know him.

Now this is the substance of the Prologue to the Gospel according to John: which is one of the most profound portions of Scripture, yet so simple that a child may comprehend it. And, because it involves the issues of life eternal, it is worthy of our earnest consideration.

"In the beginning was the Word."

That is to say, before the creation of man, or the world, or chaos, or angels and archangels, or time and space, or any other existing thing—in the beginning—beyond the remotest possibilities of thought—there was the Word. As yet this Word was unspoken. It was the divine Power of Speech, waiting to find expression in the fulness of time. It was there, as the sun is now behind our hemisphere biding the break of day.

"And the Word was with God."

This is an intimation that the Word was distinct from God: or that Christ is distinct in personality from the Father who sends him. If you see an elderly man walking down the street and talking with a younger one, it is scarcely necessary to say that these are two. So when you hear of Christ being "with" the Father and talking with him, you understand of necessity that they are distinct personalities.

"And the Word was God."

Here is an affirmation of identity. These two are one: that is, Christ in substance, though not in personality, is identical with God; as he said: "I and my Father are one."

Just here emerges the doctrine of the Trinity. It is a great mystery; wherefore it would be folly to attempt to explain it. "Three Persons in one Substance." Let it go at that.

Surely you are not going to reject a fact because you cannot comprehend it? If so you are involved in a sea of troubles; for we are surrounded by mysteries which baffle all research. If you will explain how you yourself, as a tripartite man, are so co-ordinated that body and animating spirit and immortal soul work together harmoniously in all the experiences of common life: nay more, if you will explain how mind so influences matter that I can lift my hand at will, I will agree to make perfectly clear to you the mystery of the triune God. So long as such simple and indisputable facts as these are conceded to be inexplicable it should be obvious that a divine fact like the Trinity, which is confessedly not contrarational, must not be rejected on the mere ground that we cannot comprehend it.

"All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made."

That is, all things were created by the Word or fiat of God. "He spake and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast." He said, "Let there be light": and there was light. It is a significant fact that wherever "the Lord" occurs in the account of the creation the Chaldaic, which is the oldest version of the Scriptures, substitutes *Memra* or "The Word," precisely as we have it in this Prologue. Thus Christ as the Word, or expression of the divine mind, is represented as bringing all things that are out of those that were not.

"In him was life and the life was the light of men."

That is, Christ the Word, who originated all existing things, was also the self-existing source and centre not only of material but of spiritual life; and as such he has never failed to manifest himself in some manner to the children of men. His light before the Advent was like that of the moon and stars which shine before the rising of the sun.

God is manifest in nature; but "nature speaks a various tongue"; wherefore many a scientist guided only by this dim and imperfect light, has bowed God out of doors by affirming that all things have come into existence and continued by the calm processes of impersonal law.

He manifests himself in history also; yet when the nations march to Armageddon men fail to comprehend the logic of events and cry, "How can there be a God while such things be?"

He manifests himself in personal experience.

"There's a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will." Nevertheless, while things go right, men are likely to conclude that they need no God; and when things go wrong, they decline to call upon him.

He watched over you last night as carefully as ever a mother held an ailing infant in her arms; and quite possibly you awoke and went about your business without the scant courtesy of thanks. You breathe his air and eat his food with scarcely a thought of him. By this we conclude that "natural theology" is not enough. "The light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not."

What more can he do? O that he would speak to us! Then surely would we hear his Word and know him. So be it. Enter Christ—the incarnate Word of God!

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

The divine speech is thus articulated. We call it the Incarnation. In Christ we have the full and complete expression of the mind of God. The Light of the Life now shines so clearly that those who dwell in darkness are without excuse if they fail to comprehend it.

"There comes a galley laden,
A heavenly freight on board;
It bears God's Son, the Saviour,
The great undying Word.

"And proudly floats that galley,
From troubled coast to coast;
Its sail is love and mercy;
Its mast, the Holy Ghost.

“ Now earth hath caught the anchor,
The ship hath touched the strand;
God’s Word, in fleshly garment,
The Son, steps out on land!”

It is related that when Ulysses came back from his Trojan campaign he entered his home in full armour; whereupon his son, overcome by terror, fled from him. He then unbound his helmet and laid aside his coat of glittering mail, and straightway the child ran sobbing with joy to his outstretched arms. Thus does God in Christ adjust his glory to our weakness. The Word which he speaks is “altogether lovely.” Who among us can resist it? Christ is God’s “Come unto me.”

But alas, he comes unto his own and his own receive him not! I doubt not there are men and women here tonight, as yet unacquainted with God, who refuse to approach him through this “new and living way.” But listen to this: “To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God!” Thus do we recover our birthright lost through sin. “If sons then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away.” Behold, what manner of love is here! How can any man turn his back upon it?

So runs the Prologue; and now John is ready to go on with his book. But why should he go on with it?

Why must there be a written Word to supplement the incarnate Word?

Because Christ lived in a remote corner of the world for only a brief period of thirty-three years; while his redemptive work was intended for all ages and generations to the furthest limit of time. His min-

istry must be universalized and perpetuated. The incarnate Word is therefore complemented by the written Word; which is to abide as the one ultimate and infallible authority for all that God has spoken.

In this binomial Word, incarnate and written, God makes a complete revelation of himself to the whole world and to all sorts and conditions of men.

I give the average man credit for a sincere desire to know the truth and live up to it. The difficulty is that he is so absorbed in secular life that when God speaks he either does not hear or fails to consider it. Once when Jesus was teaching in Solomon's Porch there came a Voice from heaven attesting his divine mission; and the people who stood by said, "It thundereth!" So loath are we to rightly interpret the Voice. Listen, my friend, and you will hear it!

A hunting party in the desert, having captured a score of antelopes with other game, found themselves short of water. On the point of famishing, their lips parched with thirst, they knew not what to do. A happy thought then occurred to one of them: "Let loose the antelopes." It was done; and the antelopes, with the scent of water in their nostrils, made straight for the springs. As God's men and women, made in his likeness and after his image, we have within us natural impulses that, but for the hindrance of our meaner selves, would go coursing back to him. Mind, conscience, heart and sovereign will, if left to their right direction, would straightway see his glory in the face of his beloved Son and accept in him eternal life. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God!"

The nature of sin is suicidal. It "giveth wine to

them that are under sentence of death." It dulls the fine edge of conscience in the hour of temptation, suppresses all our highest hopes and aspirations, and makes us indifferent to the warnings and exhortations of a Father who loves us with a love that passeth knowledge. "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, saith the Lord; then would I have fed them with the finest of the wheat, and with honey out of the rock would I have satisfied them."

It is written, "God who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son"; and this is followed by the significant question, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" It behooves us to "stop, look and listen"; for Christ is God's Word, his great Word, his loving Word, and his last Word to sinful men.

XVII

A MODEL CHURCH

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were wrought by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”—ACTS 2: 42-47.

THE passengers on an Atlantic steamer awoke one morning to find themselves passing the Azores. On their right the island of San Miguel rose precipitously to a height of three thousand feet, sloping toward the east. The sky was overcast; the sea gulls were flying in and out of their caves, chattering of an approaching storm. The island was overshadowed by dense clouds; but as we left it in the distance a rift opened overhead, through which the sunshine fell brightly on a valley toward the summit, where flocks could be seen peacefully grazing in the fields, and men and women, looking like pigmies, were going about the tasks of the day.

I thought of that scene as I read this brief account of the early Church: a little company of believers, assembled between the two opposing seas of Judaism

and Paganism, with the clouds of persecution gathering thickly above them. How gloriously the sunshine of God's grace and blessing seemed to rest upon them!

This was indeed an ideal Church, a forecast of what every Church should be.

I. *Observe*, to begin with, *it was a Christian Church*; that is, Christ was the vital centre of it.

It was only a month before this that the Lord had said farewell to his disciples in the upper room. At that time he had instituted the sacrament, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." It was as when a mother on her death-bed leaves a keep-sake to her children, saying, "As often as you see this, think of me." And these early disciples were loyal to their trust; for "they continued daily in the breaking of bread from house to house." The Lord was made known to them, as to the disciples of Emmaus, in this breaking of bread; and thus they gratefully remembered him. The glow and atmosphere of his personal presence still lingered about them. They talked of him; they called to mind the words which he had spoken. Their greeting was not "Good-night" and "Good-morning," but *Maranatha*, that is, "The Lord cometh!" He had scarcely gone, and lo! they were already looking for his return. The apostles were their preachers; and they did not discourse on the hypotheses of science or the dreams of philosophy, or on "fixed fate, free will, fore-knowledge absolute," but on Christ crucified, who had said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

This is what every Church ought to be. Its preachers should preach Christ; and its members should find in him their all in all.

II. Moreover, *this was an orthodox Church*: As it is written, "They gladly received his word, and continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."

The word of Christ was their ultimate rule of faith: but they received the teaching of the apostles as of equal authority, since he himself had said, "He that heareth you, heareth me." He had appointed his apostles to formulate his doctrine and had inspired them accordingly. So from the teaching of Christ and his apostles these early Christians derived a definite creed. They believed something and were able to give a reason for the faith that was in them.

This, also, is what every Church ought to be: a company of believers holding to the great verities of the Christian faith and expecting to adjust their conduct to their creed; since "as a man thinketh in his heart so is he."

III. Again, *this was a praying Church*: as it is written, "they continued steadfastly in prayer, and were daily with one accord in the temple, and went from house to house praising God."

The temple was still recognized as the house of God, and, inasmuch as Christ was "the hope of Israel," it was natural that these disciples should believe that sooner or later the Jews would accept him. Was not Jesus a Jew? Had it not been written, "Salvation is of the Jews"? No doubt these early Christians joined with all their hearts in the temple service when the Jews sang responsively their Messianic psalms. Alas, for the hope of Israel! How far the temple and the synagogues have drifted away from him!

And these Christians prayed also "from house to

house." In every home, according to custom, there was a family altar. The neighbours were invited in. In these neighbourhood gatherings, under the lingering shadow of the cross and in the sunlight of Olivet, they praised the God of their salvation.

And this surely is what every Church should be; a place of prayer "without ceasing," where the fire on the altar never goes out. For

"Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air;
His watchword at the gate of death;
He enters heaven with prayer."

IV. Furthermore, *this was a practising Church.*

The faith which the disciples professed in their creed and in their mutual prayers was translated into the terms of daily life, else would it never have been written that "they had favour with all the people." They were compassed about with witnesses, who were watching them, taking knowledge of them, and passing judgment upon them. And they were regarded with favour by these witnesses because it was seen that they were exemplifying their profession in a consistent life.

This, too, is what every Church ought to be. Christ said, "Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world; let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify God."

V. Further still, *this was a fraternal Church*; so much so that "they had all things common."

The Communism here referred to is like a fore-

gleam of the Golden Age when "man to man the world o'er shall brothers be." There was no respect of persons among these early Christians. There were some who owned property while others were prisoners of poverty: but all were knit together by brotherly love. There was no Utopian dream of Communism in this community. It is not written that goods and possessions were sold except so far as "every man had need." The rich regarded their wealth as a divine trust and, as stewards, they held it at the divine call: so that, when there was need, they gladly sold and imparted to the poor. The Church was thus a fraternal guild for mutual helpfulness.

This is obviously what every Church should be. The sanctuary is the one place in all the world where rich and poor should meet together and acknowledge the Lord as the maker of them all.

VI. Again, *this Church kept open house*; so that others were "added to it daily."

The pew-rental system had not yet come into vogue. There was welcome and a glad hand for all. It was a quarter of a century later when James was moved to write, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons; for if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring in goodly apparel and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing and say unto him Sit thou here in a good place, and say to the poor Stand thou there or Sit here under my foot-stool, are ye not then partial in yourselves and are become judges of evil thought? Harken, my beloved brethren; hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of the

kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? ”

This also indicates what every Church should be. No cold shoulder to strangers; no distinctions of caste; no front seat for the man with a gold ring and back seat for the man in mean apparel. Welcome is the shibboleth that will win the people. No waiting in the vestibule till pewholders are seated. If there must needs be a pew-rental, let it be understood that the Church is not the house of the pewholder, but the house of God. There must be an equally cordial welcome for all.

VII. Once more *this was a Church where signs and wonders were wrought.*

The miracle of Pentecost had just occurred. The apostles had been endowed with the *charismata*, that is, miraculous gifts of healing. These were necessary in the infancy of the Church, as a scaffolding is while a building is being erected; but they were merely incidental and tributary to the important work which the disciples of Christ were called upon to do. Their supreme miracle was not the healing of the sick, but the conversion of souls. In one day there were added unto them about three thousand. What a day that must have been when the voices of the three thousand were raised with one accord in thanksgiving for deliverance from sin!

And this, we will agree, is what every Church ought to be. The annual report of one of our largest denominations shows that last year the ingathering was approximately one soul for each Church. There is a famine in the land! Why should not revivals be the rule rather than the exception in our Churches?

Is God's arm shortened that he cannot save? Has he forgotten his promise, "If earthly parents know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more shall your Father in Heaven give the Holy Ghost to them that ask of him?" Where is the blame? Do we really want revivals? Have we a passion for souls? Do we recognize the vital importance of the gift of the Holy Ghost? Or are we in default as to our tithes; our tithes of time and energy as well as of earthly possessions? The promise holds good, now as ever, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

But there was one thing lacking in this early Church; to wit, the missionary spirit.

The Lord had said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." He had told them to "preach repentance and remission of sins in his name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem." But they remained at Jerusalem, seeming to be content with their work among their townsmen. They needed a broader vision of the world-wide conquest. They were working in upon themselves and zealously husbanding their resources in Jerusalem while the unevangelized world was stretching out its hands and calling "Come over and help us!"

How should this little home-keeping company of Christians be broken up? Not long after the miracle of Pentecost the Evangelist Stephen was stoned. This was the signal of persecution. The disciples with

blanched faces fled for their lives; "and they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." God will have his way with us. If we refuse to learn the lesson of the miracle of the loaves he will teach us our duty by the miracle of the storm. The Church that tarries at Jerusalem cannot prosper. The Gospel is not a pool on a private reservation, but a river watering the fields everywhere on its glad way to the sea. The ethical imperative is upon us. The duty of the Christian is to go. Go ye out into the highways and the hedges. Go ye into the dense centres of life! Go ye out to the frontiers! Go to the uttermost parts of the earth. Go everywhere and constrain souls to come in! Go in person if you can; by your influence in any case. But go the Church must, and every soul within it.

All this is clear enough in the light of that early picture of the ideal Church. We will agree that this is what every Church ought to be; but we will also probably agree that this is not what the Church is. What then? It is the obvious duty of every true Christian to do his utmost to make it so.

If we were faithful in our appointed places, the result would be like that which was portrayed by Bunyan in his *Palace Beautiful*. Then said Christian to the porter, "Sir, what house is this; and may I lodge here for the night?" He answered, "This is the house of the Lord of the Hill, and he built it for the relief and security of pilgrims." The bell was rung and the door was opened, and he was welcomed by many of the family who said, "Come in thou blessed of the Lord." The supper being over he was led to a chamber called Peace, with a window toward the East;

and when the day broke, after a pleasant sleep, he awoke and looked forth on the Delectable Mountains, and saw in the far distance the Celestial City; where-upon he sang:

“Where am I now? Is this the loving care
Of Jesus for the men that pilgrims are;
Thus to provide that I should be forgiven,
And dwell already the next door to heaven?”

Yes, this is what the Church ought to be: a place provided for the entertainment of strangers, “the next door to heaven,” with foretastes of the joys which there await us.

A word to those who remain outside of the Church because it is not what it ought to be. There is an old proverb which says that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. We admit that the Church is not what it ought to be, and that we are no better than we ought to be; but we are putting up the best fight we can for character and usefulness. We stumble and fall, but by God’s grace, we press on.

If you are like minded you could not do better than join us: that is, if you feel the need of Christ as your Saviour and are ready to accept him. Come thou with us and we will do thee good. You can help us; and we can help you while we journey on together toward a better country, even an heavenly, and toward the city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

XVIII

YEA AND NAY

“But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, was not yea and nay; but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”—II COR. 1:18.

THE apostle was on the defensive; his back was against the wall.

In a letter written some time previously to the Christians of Corinth he had promised to make them a visit before he went to Macedonia and, if possible, to spend the winter with them. He had not come; therefore he was charged with breaking his word. It is a slight matter to break an arm or a bloodvessel, as compared with breaking one's word. But Paul was not to blame. The fact was that he had been prevented by a severe attack of illness from doing as he had promised: but his explanation was briefly disposed of. He was less concerned for the vindication of his own truthfulness than for the inculcation of certain truths which had a vital bearing on the spiritual welfare of his Corinthian friends. “It matters little,” he writes, “what you think of me personally, so long as you receive the essential facts of the Gospel to the saving of your souls.”

The first of these fundamental facts is that *God is*

true. In another place he emphasizes this in still stronger terms, "Let God be true and every man a liar" (Romans 3:4).

My associate, in his opening prayer, referred to God as "the great Constant": that is, the always dependable One. "With him is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning." He is characterized as "the God of truth." His *yea* is *yea* and his *nay* is *nay*; and there is no possibility of misunderstanding him.

It is said that when the Shorter Catechism was being prepared by the Westminster Assembly of divines a grave perplexity arose as to the proper definition of God. One of the younger men was asked to pray for guidance. He began in this manner: "O God, thou who art a spirit infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in thy being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth"; and those words were incorporated in the historic symbol as furnishing the best definition of God. He is indeed "unchangeable in his truth." When he speaks it is without vagueness or equivocation. His word is always the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

It is not so with Satan. Of him Jesus said, "He is a liar and the father of it." The first temptation was when he sat, as Milton puts it, "squat like a toad beside the ear of Eve," saying "Yea, hath God said 'In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die?' Thou shalt not *surely* die!" Some thousands of years after, he tempted Sapphira in the same way. When Peter said "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much," she answered "Yea, for so much." This, being only half the truth, was rightly construed as a

suggestion of Satan to "lie unto the Spirit of God."

The second of the facts affirmed by Paul is that "*Jesus Christ, whom we have preached among you, was not yea and nay; but in him was yea.*"

The only-begotten Son, the incarnate Word of God, is himself the living and perpetual witness to the divine veracity. No sooner had man sinned than the protevangel was given, "The Seed of woman shall come in the fulness of time to bruise the serpent's head and deliver man from the shame and penalty of sin." The world waited four thousand years for his coming, waited so long that the lamps of the golden candlestick were extinguished and hope deferred had made the heart sick; and then, in the darkest hour which is just before dawn, he came! The angel of the annunciation said to Joseph, "All this is come to pass that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and his name shall be called Immanuel, which being interpreted is God with us.'" So Christ, the great Fulfillment, is himself the standing and eternal witness to the divine truth.

And his teaching was never yea and nay, but always yea. No one who listened to him, as he preached in the streets of Jerusalem or in Solomon's Porch or on the Mount of Olives, ever knit his brows in perplexity as if to say, "I wonder what he means." He spoke of the profoundest mysteries and the most bewildering problems that are ever presented to mortal minds; yet his logic rang clear as a bell. He declared the truth about the truth so simply that the humblest of truth-seekers could comprehend it.

Ask Jesus what he thinks about God; "God is a

spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth." Ask him what he thinks about immortality: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die!" Ask him what he thinks about the Bible: "Thy Word is truth." Ask him what he thinks about heaven: "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you." Ask him what he thinks about hell: he answers with bated breath, "Their fire is not quenched; their worm dieth not." You may not like his teaching; but you must concede that there was no uncertainty about it.

He never taught with an if or a perhaps or a peradventure; but always with a "Verily, verily I say unto you." The people said, "He teacheth not as the scribes"—that is, with an ever-recurring reference to the opinions of others who had gone before him—"but with authority." He was the greatest dogmatist that ever lived in this world of ours. "Verily, verily I say unto you!"

Is there any other preacher who would dare to speak that way? The world would laugh at him. That word of Jesus "I say" goes crashing through the ancient corridors of rabbinical tradition like a thunderbolt. In vain will you search for any note of compromise. It is not enough for him to claim that his teaching is true; he said "I am the Truth!" Before his yea all schools of Philosophy come crashing down. "Ye have heard how it was said by them of old time; but I say unto you!" So positive, unqualified, dogmatic and distinctly orthodox was the teaching of Christ. It was precise as clockwork and clear as the

shining of the sun. How could it be otherwise, since he claimed to be the incarnate Word of God?

The third fact emphasized by Paul is that *the promises of the written Word were not yea and nay but yea and amen, unto the glory of God.*

The Bible is a handbook of "exceeding great and precious promises." They are like stepping-stones to help us over the marshy places of life. Adam Clark undertook to compile them under a series of categories in a book called "The Faithful Promiser." His purpose was to show how wonderfully they had been fulfilled in history and human experience. But there are some promises that he could not include in his categories because they are mere intimations of good things to come, faint suggestions of an inheritance as yet undreamed of. Here is one of them: "Now are we sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be." O my friends, great surprises await us in the heavenly life! "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him."

And all these promises are "yea and amen in him." You may read your Bible through without finding ambiguity in any of them. Any such ambiguity would be fatal to the divine truth. The three great promises of the ancient Scriptures have to do with the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Christ. Put an if under the manger and the whole Gospel is blown to atoms. Put an if under the Cross and not only the hope of saints militant but the song of the saints triumphant is reduced to the stuff that dreams are made of. Put an if under the open sepulchre, and

life and immortality vanish into thin air ; as Paul elsewhere says, " If Christ be not risen then they which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished ; our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain, ye are yet in your sins."

The fourth proposition which Paul lays down is that *his own preaching is not yea and nay but always yea*. And this he affirms not only for himself but for Silvanus and Timothy and the other apostles who were commissioned to preach a positive Gospel for the salvation of men.

The reason why so-called " liberalism " takes issue with the Pauline theology is because it declines all compromise with error. The fact is, however, that Paul's theology is simply the theology of Christ, reduced, by his authority and by divine inspiration, to systematic form. He stands for the co-equal Godhood of Jesus, the infallible integrity of Scripture and the vital importance of justification by faith. To him these are yea and amen. As to these fundamental truths his trumpet rings with a note of unswerving loyalty to his Lord, a note of fearless confidence out-measuring that of Luther's great manifesto " Here I stand ; I cannot otherwise, God help me ! "

The same is true of his ethical teaching. The Law of Sinai, so far from being abrogated by the Law of Olivet, is doubly riveted to the Christian life by the Law of Liberty wherewith the Son makes free. " What shall we say, then ? Shall we go on to sin that grace may abound ? God forbid ! For being made free from sin, ye are become the servants of righteousness." Wherefore Paul concludes that a Christian is bound to yoke up his profession with practice and

bring the bottom of his life up to the top of his light. This, in his philosophy, is "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

What, now, are the practical lessons for us?

For me as a minister of the Gospel, the lesson is a very searching one. In my covenant vow I voluntarily entered into a solemn covenant to "maintain and defend" certain doctrines contained in the Word of God. I have, therefore, no alternative but either to stand foresworn or to imitate the straightforwardness of Paul, who in his farewell to the elders of Ephesus said, "I take you to record that I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God." If this means anything it means that, in common honesty, I am bound to "keep nothing back" but to declare the whole truth about the truth as God gives me to see it.

I am not at liberty to play fast and loose with definitions, which is as blameworthy as uttering false coin. The dictionary, based upon immemorial usage, is the accepted standard of meanings. It was a true saying of Mirabeau "Words are things." They are more; they are living things; they are living thoughts and beliefs going about to instruct or to deceive men.

If I say "I believe in God," while inwardly I conceive him to be mere impersonal Law or Energy or "a something not ourselves that maketh for righteousness," my definition is not that of common currency; and, so far forth, I have ceased to be an honest man.

If I say "I believe in the only-begotten Son of God" while holding that his "divinity" was not more than that of other men, the truth is not in me.

If I say I believe in the resurrection of Christ,

meaning only that his influence survived him, I am deceiving those who hear me.

If I say "I believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures" while rejecting the claim that they were "written by holy men as they were moved by the spirit of God," that is, "God-breathed" and necessarily true, I stand self-convicted of duplicity and prevarication. I am playing hocus-pocus with doctrines which I have sworn to maintain and defend. My definitions, privately made, are not coin of the realm. My word of honour is not positive but *yea and nay*. My standard of honesty is below that of the marketplace; my I.O.U. is protested, not being worth the paper it is written on.

But the lesson has a wider reach. It cuts deep into the personal honesty of all who profess to follow Christ. A true Christian is under bonds to say what he means and to mean precisely what he says. He is to imitate Christ in his devotion to truth. "Let the mind that was in Christ Jesus be also in you."

"Lord make me like thyself;
Lord make me be myself;
Seeming as one who lives to thee,
And being what I seem to be."

The trouble with us is that we do not acquaint ourselves with Christ sufficiently to catch the similitude of his life and character. An occasional glimpse of his face, in our morning and evening devotions, may be enough to persuade us that he is indeed the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely, but what we need is the holding of his hand while we walk all day with him. Only so can we grow into the like-

ness of his love and justice and absolute clarity of profession and life.

A South Sea islander once told his experience in this way: "I heard the missionary preach about sin; and he and I were like two canoes going side by side. Then he spoke of salvation; and I dropped behind, with broken mast and torn sail. The winds drove me to a barren shore where I lay hopeless for a time. Then I arose in the darkness and felt my way like a blind man groping along a wall. On a sudden I touched a door: it opened before me, and there stood my Saviour with the glory shining in his face. Low at his feet, I cried, 'Lord, I believe!' He gave me his hand and lifted me up; saying 'Let us walk together.' So now I walk with him."

The grip of that hand assures the rightness of our lives. Intimacy with him is our safeguard against all allurements: for Truth was his name and honesty was the keynote of his life. He said, "Let your communication be yea yea, nay nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh to evil." Yea, yea to truth! Nay, nay to error! If we are Christians let us say so and stand for it.

XIX

THE FAR-AWAY LOOK

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—II. COR. 4: 17.

IT is an old proverb that misfortunes never come singly: or as Hamlet puts it, “When sorrows come, they come not singly but in great battalions.” So it was with this man; he was submerged in a sea of troubles. Hear him, “Once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, five times have I received forty stripes save one; in journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in weariness and painfulness; in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, in labours abundant, in prisons frequent, in death oft.” Yet what an effervescent spirit have we here! “None of these things move me. I am troubled on every side yet not distressed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed. If I must needs glory I will glory in tribulation!”

He speaks of his afflictions as “light.” To him they are like the feathers of a bird, a burden indeed, yet helping him to mount upward into the clearer air.

He speaks of them as "but for a moment," when in point of fact they had continued for upward of thirty years with scarcely a breathing spell. It reminds us of old Robert Herrick's song, "Tumble me down, and I will sit exultant on my ruins yet!" How shall we account for it?

By the far-away look in his eyes. He is seeing things beyond the here and now. He thinks of himself as belonging to two worlds. He is a pilgrim on his way to a better country, and the hardships that befall him are as when a king's messenger trips and falls and with the cry, "It is nothing," hurries on. Thus, as Shakespeare says, "~~The labour we delight in~~ physics pain."

I. One of the two worlds to which this man belongs is *the world of the seen*; made up of the sum total of material things which can be apprehended by the physical senses.

This is the world of Natural Science, which takes cognizance of nothing but tangible facts. Its denizens are materialists. They see gold and therefore covet it. They hear the sounds of merry-making in Vanity Fair and mingle with it. They feel the pangs of hunger and thirst and cry, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

This world of the seen is *a little world*. It is like a ten-acre farm among the hills, where a man toils with never a look beyond his narrow environment of time and space. No dreams of Carcassonne! The hills and the clouds are his horizons, and they fold him in.

It is a transitory world. Not long ago the Czar of Russia sat upon a throne which seemed most real,

because he could lay his hand upon it. He wore a crown which, despite its sparkling glories weighed as a real burden on a weary brow. He wielded a sceptre whereat a hundred millions of abject people trembled and bowed low. Where are they now? "Sceptre and crown must tumble down, and in the dust be equal made with the poor crooked scythe and spade." So passes away the glory of this little world.

"The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind."

In view of such ^{to the} considerations what fools we are to live for things that perish with the using; to toil with muckrakes for yellow dust that will presently sift through our cold fingers, to seek for pleasure in laughter that dies away like the crackling of thorns; to climb up ladders to earthly emolument with nothing but day-dreams to show for it! Let us go back to our kindergartens and read again the story of Jack and the Beanstalk; and may the mouths of babes and sucklings teach us to quit ourselves like men.

II. The other world is *the world of the unseen*: that is, of the things which lie beyond the narrow circumscription of the physical senses and can only be comprehended by faith.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It is a sixth sense, by which we are distinguished from all the lower orders of life. It belongs to us by virtue of the fact that we are created in the image and after the likeness

of God. By it we are enabled to face the great verities and solve the problems of the spiritual life.

The world to which it introduces us is a great world. "No pent up Utica contracts our powers." Go out on a starry night with your telescope and look on the spangled heavens. How far away is yonder moon? Two hundred thousand miles! And yonder fixed star? Some billions more! See how the ships of God's armada come wheeling into the field of infinite space! Count them if you can. But you are still in the little world of the seen. Look through the interstellar spaces to the great beyond! Leave time and space behind and dream of the infinite.

There lies the great world to which we belong: a world beyond our scope of fleshly vision. If faith fails you now, give up all hope of apprehending it. This is the world of invisible laws and forces, of truths, and principles, of life beyond the swinging of a pendulum, of provinces beyond the boundaries of space, of souls beyond bodies and of immortals at home with God. Thither I am destined by virtue of my divine birthright. My three-score years and ten are but the vestibule of life.

"It must be so! Plato, thou reasonest well;
Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
This longing after immortality?
'Tis the divinity that stirs within us!
'Tis Heaven itself that points out an hereafter
And intimates eternity to man!
The stars shall fade away, the sun himself
Grow dim with age and nature sink in years;
But thou shalt flourish in eternal youth,
Unhurt amid the war of elements;
The wreck of matter and the crush of worlds!"

III. How then as to *the reckoning between these two worlds?* Blessed is he who measures aright the relative significance of the seen and the unseen. Put this world into the balance with that other, and behold a grain of sand against a universe. O world of the seen, thou art weighed and found wanting! The man who reads not this parable is dull as that Belshazzar who lost his Kingdom because he could not interpret God's writing on the wall. "I reckon," said Paul after striking the balance, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us!"

I call your attention to four important facts with reference to these unseen things.

To begin with, they are *more real* than the things that are visible and tangible. God is more real than nature, because he made it. The soul, likewise, is more real than the body that it lives in. The Romans wrote on their graves *Emigravit*, "he has moved on." So, says Paul, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved we have an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." What sordid creature shall tell me that "Death ends all?" Death ends nothing. It begins all.

Moreover, the things which are unseen and eternal are *more substantial* than those which are seen and temporal. Of our country we sing, "I love thy rocks and rills, thy woods and templed hills"; but he is a poor citizen who does not build his patriotism on the great principles that lend all beauty to our rocks and rills. The flag which we proudly call "Old Glory" is but a barren ideality except as it projects our loyalty into the far more actual though invisible province of

freedom and human rights. The silver dollar that you hold in your hand would be worth no more than wampum were it not for its collateral security. The superscription, "U. S. A.," which it bears, is not so substantial as the invisible bond of the Commonwealth behind it. But without faith we could never get beyond the dollar and the flag. Yet there are stupid folk who think of faith as mere credulity, with no evidence to support it! On the contrary, faith is *sub-sto*; the substance of things hoped for. And faith is *e-videns*, "the evidence of things not seen."

Still further, the things of the invisible world are *more immediate* than those which we can see. We say we are "floating on a river toward a boundless sea." Nothing of the sort. There is no river; we are already on the sea. Time is in eternity. It is an infinitesimal arc of the infinite circle. Heaven is not "a happy land, far, far away"; we are in heaven or hell here and now. When Confucius said, "I know nothing about the future, and therefore I concern myself only for the world I am now living in," he laid the foundations of a materialistic philosophy which doomed four hundred millions of Chinamen to sordidness for a thousand years. And the man who argues from the same premise will never rise above the Chinese level of life.

It remains to add that the unseen things are *more knowable* than the seen. We say "seeing is believing!" but we know better. Our physical senses are all the while deceiving us. The lantern which you see in yonder swamp is a will-o'-the-wisp. A roll of thunder proves to be merely a blast in a neighbouring quarry. Any thimble-rigger can fool you. But when

faith has once implanted a conviction of God and the invisible truths which centre in him there is no power in the universe that can dislodge it. Here is the rock on which the Christian rests. No if or peradventure troubles him. His shibboleth is "I know!"—"I know that my Redeemer liveth!"—"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day!" His faith is a personal faith, taking hold on a personal Christ, and finding all the great verities in him.

To this end Christ came into the world, that he might give his people the far-away look. He postulated all his teaching on the reality of the unseen world and our vital interest in it. Take away God and immortality, and the Gospel is resolved into *nil*. Take away the supreme importance of other-worldliness and the Cross is no more than two transverse beams on which a man dies like other men. "I go to prepare a place for you," said Christ; "in my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you." Wherefore we are enjoined to lay up treasure not here but in the world further on. And to make that injunction the more impressive, he propounds a problem that staggers all science and philosophy, "*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his life?*"

How, then, are we living? Are we among those who, "forever hastening to the grave, stoop downward as they run?" Or have we the far-away look? Are we sojourning here as "pilgrims and strangers, looking for a better country, even an heavenly, and for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God?"

This is the secret of a happy life. In these troublous times it solves the problems of history by enabling us to read between the lines. Otherwise our hearts would fail us, like that of the young man in Dothan who, seeing the city invested by a hostile army, exclaimed, "Master, we are lost! What shall we do?" And the prophet prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes that he may see"; whereupon the novice cried, "Master, the mountains are full of the Lord's horses and chariots!"

It is for lack of the far-away look that we fail also to interpret providence in our personal lives. It was a rule among the epic poets that no incident should be brought into the narrative which did not contribute to the denouement. This was called "the rule of the dramatic unities." A like rule is discernible in the divine watch-care. It is obvious, however, that one who reads only a page at a time sees life as a tangled skein. The man who in the midst of his vicissitudes perceives that time is only the preface of an endless serial, and that prosperity and adversity are warp and woof of a royal garment with which he is to be clothed forever, speaks no more of threads and thrums but, recognizing the dramatic unities, he rejoices that "all things work together for good to them that love God." What then shall we say?

"Rise, my soul, and stretch thy wings,
Thy better portion trace;
Rise from transitory things
Toward heaven, thy native place:
Sun and moon and stars decay;
Time shall soon this earth remove;
Rise, my soul, and haste away
To seats prepared above!"

One of the ancient poets tells of two doubters who agreed that, whichever of them first passed on, was to return and enlighten the other. One night, while mourning for the recent death of his comrade, the survivor heard above the sighing wind the patter of a horse's hoofs and then a low voice saying, "These things are true!" The fable touches close on fact. "Here we know in part and see as in a glass darkly"; but there we shall understand the relative importance of material and spiritual things.

Meanwhile let us covet and cultivate the larger scope of vision. *Sursum corda!* Up with thy heart! "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

We live forever!

XX

UNUTTERABLE THINGS

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell; God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell; God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory; yet of myself I will not glory but in mine infirmities."—II COR. 12: 2-5.

BLESSED is the man who has a vision. "The world is so much with us." It is well that dwellers in the Valley of Sordid Care should climb the mountains now and then and look off into the regions beyond. But, alas! the paths are steep, and the journey is a long one, and Little Faith is ever saying, "Let us be practical: the other world is a great ways off; content yourself with the things that are here and now."

It was fourteen years since Paul had this vision; and *he had never mentioned it*. Now, however, necessity was laid upon him. His enemies, the false teachers of Corinth and elsewhere, jealous of his growing influence, were buzzing about him like bees. They had even undertaken to impugn his credentials as an apostle of Christ.

So far as he was personally concerned he might have

passed this by; but the fruits of his ministry were in danger and the honour of his Master was at stake. He could not keep silence. He must vindicate his authority; even at the risk of being called a fool and a braggart. He therefore presents his credentials on this wise: "Bear with me in my folly. Seeing that mine enemies glory. I will glory also. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool, I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Do they trumpet their zeal? So can I; in journeyings often, in perils without number, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Do they challenge my apostleship because, as they say, I never saw Jesus? I am indeed as one born out of due time; but on my journey to Damascus I saw him so glorified that the sight blinded mine eyes. Do they question my commission? He sent his messenger to declare me 'a chosen vessel to bear his name before the Gentiles.' Do they call for the fruits of my labour? Behold the seal of the Spirit in souls converted; ye are my joy and crown. Ah, but they speak of dreams and transports! So be it. Let us come to visions and revelations of the Lord." And then, veiling himself in a transparent pseudonym, he tells what happened to him fourteen years ago.

The one thing to be observed above all others in this narrative is its scrupulous reserve. Paul says he "was caught up into the third heaven." Where is that third heaven; and how was he caught up into it? Was it through some mysterious clairvoyance? Was it a flight of the sub-conscious ego? Did he take his

body with him; or did he leave it as when a man goes out of his house and closes the door behind him? Paul was a metaphysical expert, as much so probably as any scholar of his time, yet his only answer is, "Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell."

And what did he see in that third heaven? What wonders burst on his poor, blinking eyes? Of these he has nothing to say. The mere fact of the vision, which had been held in reserve so scrupulously for fourteen years, is all that he gives us. Why this reticence? It was doubtless due to the fact that he had come up against certain limitations which are generally known and regarded by wise men.

I. There was the Limitation of Knowledge. In this vision he had been transported to a region which baffled the powers of a finite mind. He had been carried beyond the purview of the physical senses into a region where mortal man could only say, "This bewilders me!"

The three heavens to which he refers are easy to explain. The first is that which lies about us. It is the heaven of the atmosphere and the floating clouds. It is the heaven of the Weather Bureau. It is the little heaven of the atmosphere, fifty miles deep or thereabouts, enveloping our world. We know practically all that need be known about it.

The second is the heaven of the stars; and with this we are less familiar. Science has many things to say in these premises; some of which are the satisfactory results of exact calculation, others of which are mere guesswork. It is a vast heaven, where worlds innumerable float like the ships of a great armada on a

boundless sea. As you gaze into the far distance, still they come, new fleets of worlds, clouds of star-dust, boundless, incomputable, apparently infinite! A scientist still in his 'teens will undertake to tell you all about them; but ask an old astronomer what he knows with respect to this second heaven and he will say, "I am still repeating what I learned at my mother's knee,

" 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star;
How I wonder what you are.' "

The third heaven is beyond. Paul calls it "Paradise." This is the heaven where God's throne is; the home of angels and archangels and saints triumphant. It is the heaven where God means us to dwell forever: yet how little we know about it. We are living on an island in the midst of an immeasurable ocean. Now and then a man wades out in the surf, but only a little ways. A tall man, like John the Evangelist, can wade further; but soon he, too, finds himself beyond his depth. We catch a glimpse of a City afar off with golden domes and pinnacles; and again of a country of "sweet fields beyond the swelling flood, all dressed in living green." But these are only glimpses after all.

"We may not know how sweet its balmy air,
How bright and fair its flowers:
We may not hear the songs that echo there
Through those enchanted bowers.
But sometimes, when adown the western sky
The fiery sunset lingers,
The golden gates swing inward noiselessly,
Unlocked by unseen fingers:
And while they stand a moment half ajar
Gleams, from the inner glory,
Stream brightly through the azure vault afar
And half reveal the story."

It was into this third heaven that Paul was caught up; but he does not venture to describe it; possibly because he realized that he knew so little about it. Perhaps he found the things of Paradise unutterable because they were really unintelligible to him. Why not? Can a gourd hold the ocean? No more can the mind of a mortal man contain the things of Paradise. Let it suffice that the place is there awaiting us. The man who has had a vision never doubts it.

II. Another difficulty which confronted Paul was the Limitation of Utterance. He says that he heard "unspeakable words" and saw things "which it is not lawful for a man to utter." What does he mean? What "law" was it that hindered his speaking out?

Was it an interdict which God had laid upon him? Had he been enjoined, as they say Peter Martyr was, who is always represented with his finger on his lips? Had the Lord said to him, "See thou tell no man"?

Or was it the boundaries of speech that gave him pause? There are indeed many things in our experience for which there are no words in our vocabulary. You will search the dictionary in vain for the where-withal to express a mother's love. So there are "songs without words." Did you never stand on a mountain-top and look on a far-reaching landscape which baffled the largest possibilities of speech? Who has ever adequately described a storm at sea; or the beauty of a sunset; or the solemnity of a death-bed?

"I wonder if ever a song was sung but the singer's heart sang sweeter;

I wonder if ever a hymn was rung but the theme surpassed the meter;

I wonder if ever a sculptor wrought
Till the cold stone echoed his ardent thought;
Or if ever a painter with light and shade
The dream of his inmost soul portrayed?"

Or perhaps the restraint of expediency was laid upon him. It is not always wise to tell all that one knows. There are frequent occasions when speech is silver, but silence golden. This is the lesson of that homely fable of Æsop where he tells of a lion calling to a sheep and asking, "Is my breath sweet?" When the sheep answered "No," he bit off his head for slander. He then called a wolf and asked, "Is my breath sweet?" And when the wolf answered "Yes," he bit off his head for flattery. He then called a fox and asked, "Is my breath sweet?" And the fox, coughing and sneezing, said, "I have such a cold that I really cannot say"; whereupon the lion said, "Come with me; thou art the wise one." We all talk too much; or, if not that, we all say too much that had better be left unsaid, and withhold too much of what might profitably be said to those about us.

In the interview of Moses and Elias with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration it is noteworthy that they had nothing to say about the heaven they were living in. Their entire conversation had to do with a certain event which was about to transpire, not in Paradise, but in this world of ours. The three disciples who were present at that interview were profoundly interested in Paradise and would have given much to hear what Moses and Elias had to say about it. One of them had been there fifteen hundred years and the other a thousand years. What a scroll of wonders they might have unfolded! But not a word. They spake

only of the approaching tragedy of the Cross; only of that which was of practical value to mortal men. Had it been important for James and Peter and John to know the details and particulars of Paradise, it is not to be doubted that something would have been said to enlighten them; but, as matters stand, we are left to believe that they were better without it.

III. There was still another difficulty, which was perhaps most insuperable, namely, the Limitation of Confidence. *len*

Not a few of our interviews with God are under the ban of silence. The hour of conversion is of such a character; a man of sensibility will think twice before he calls in the passer-by. So with all our deepest experiences of joy and sorrow: "The heart knoweth its own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy." Have you never gone to the trysting place, with burdens that seemed beyond all bearing, and shut the door, and bared your soul before God with strong crying, until you felt his near approach and his right hand laid upon you, and heard his voice saying comfortable things; so that you came out at length with tears on your eyelashes and your finger on your lips?

Who shall estimate the value of such visions in their application to the needs of common life? Here is the effective remedy for doubt. It is safe to say that Paul's creed was emphasized by that excursion into the third heaven. He had believed before: had believed as we do, in God and the Incarnation, the Atonement, the sanctifying influence of the Spirit and all the rudimentals of our faith; but on coming back from Paradise he must have said within himself, "Oh,

these things are infinitely truer than I thought! I do believe. I cannot but believe. This is the Gospel of reality."

And no doubt his character was influenced in the same way. He could not have looked into the infinite and eternal without forming a just conception of the relative value of things. When he saw men in Corinth busy with muckrakes, gathering a little yellow dust; and pleasure-seekers busy in the eager chase of thistle-down and butterflies; and men a-tiptoe reaching vainly after tinsel crowns, he must have thought, "Alas! that they should set their hearts on things that perish with the using! Why do they ignore those graces which enter into the enduring fabric of character?" And pursuant to this thought he wrote a letter in which he said, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things!"

The vision must also have produced a deeper and sweeter tone in all his preaching; for now he could say, "That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we have handled, declare we unto you!"

I think it was Summerfield who, when he lay dying, closed his eyes awhile and, on opening them, said to a friend at his bedside, "Oh, now if I could go into my pulpit, how I could preach! For I have looked into eternity! I have seen the King in his beauty! I have been caught up like Paul into the third heaven! Oh, how I could preach!"

So I say blessed is the man who has a vision! Yet

the vision is nothing of itself but only a means to an end. It has no value except as it illuminates the soul and is translated into the terms of common life. This was in the mind of Paul when he concluded his reference to the vision by saying, "Yet if I must needs glory, I will glory in mine infirmities; for in my weakness the power of God resteth upon me."

Then he proceeds to give us the practical application of the vision: "Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations, there was given unto me a thorn in the flesh. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me; and he said, 'My grace is sufficient for thee. For my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

It matters not whether it be a thorn or a vision, if only it be thankfully received as the gift of a loving God. His purpose is to prepare us for that third heaven and for the tasks there awaiting us. Thorns or visions, they are "all in the day's work"; and all alike are subsidized for the good of them that love God. Power for service is what we need. If there is more power in the thorn than in the vision, God help us to welcome it! There is no higher attainment than service; no more desirable gift than power; no better prayer than this: "Prepare me, Lord, for that which thou hast prepared for me."

XXI

UNANSWERED PRAYERS

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”—II COR. 12:7-9.

PAUL was a praying man.

He began his Christian experience on his knees; as it is written, “The Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go to the house of Judas in the street which is called Straight and inquire for one Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he prayeth.’” Beginning thus he kept on praying all his life.

And his prayers were answered so graciously, so abundantly, so wonderfully, that his life was one continuous sacrifice of praise. “Thanks be to God,” he cries, “who always maketh us to triumph in Christ”; and again, “We are enriched in everything, to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.”

Nevertheless one boon was denied him. He longed to be delivered from an affliction which he calls his

"thorn in the flesh," a painful malady that sorely crippled and oftentimes disabled him. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." But it did not depart from him. He lived and died with it.

Why was his prayer not granted? The question is one that comes home to all. For where is the Christian who has not a secret chamber in the back of his memory where old prayers, offered once and again with futile tears, are laid away as sad memorials of hope deferred? Why were they not answered?

Surely it has not been because the Lord is unable to grant our requests; since "nothing is too hard for him."

Nor has it been because he is unwilling to bless us; for "if earthly parents know how to give good things to their children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

Is it, then, because our prayers have been at fault? "Ye ask and receive not," says James, "because ye ask amiss." Did Paul ask amiss? An inquiry as to the manner of his prayer may help to solve the problem of our disappointments.

Was his request denied because he had not been really praying but only "saying his prayers"; which is a very different thing? God does not bow the heavens to come down in answer to a rigmarole of "O Lords" and "We beseech thees"; any more than he heeds the mechanical tally of a rosary. We are not heard for our lip service, for much speaking, for vain repetitions or for long prayers at the corners of the streets. But Paul's prayers were not after that fashion. It is

he who gives us that felicitous definition of prayer, "the heart's desire." For in prayer "the lips ne'er act the winning part without the sweet concurrence of the heart."

Was it, then, because he had not learned to say "Abba, Father"? Everything depends on that; as Jesus said, "When ye pray, say, 'Our Father.'" A wayward son who never comes home except to make a demand upon his father's purse has a poor conception of filial love. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

But this was not the trouble in Paul's case; for it is he who emphasizes "the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" He came lovingly and obediently to the mercy seat, with full confidence in the promise, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you."

Or perhaps he could not say, "In Jesus' Name." This is the countersign at the door of the audience chamber. No man has the shadow of a hope in his own name. All the guards of justice stand round about the King's door to prevent a self-righteous suppliant from entering in. The only way is "the new and living way" which was opened to us when the veil was rent on Calvary into the Holiest of All. Our only plea at the mercy seat is the blood which is sprinkled upon it.

And Paul realized that fact; for he says, "Being justified by faith we have peace with God *through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*"

Well, possibly, it was because Paul was cherishing some ^{secret} darling sin. In that event he could not hope for an audience, since, as David says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." Not that we are to be perfect before we can pray; but a cherished sin, persisted in wilfully and deliberately, stands as an impassable barrier between the soul and God.

That, however, was not the case with Paul; for if ever a man lived who hated sin it was he. Listen to this; "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? *God forbid!* How shall we that are dead to sin continue any longer therein? Let not sin, therefore, have dominion over you; for the wages of sin is death." The mere suggestion of continuing in sin horrified him.

Or was his petition denied because he was entertaining some grudge against a fellowman? This is another of the fatal hindrances to successful prayer. The Lord said, "When ye stand praying, forgive if ye have aught against any; for if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father in heaven forgive you."

It is certain that Paul had a hot temper. He quarrelled with Peter and again with Barnabas; but he was as quick to forgive as he was to resent a wrong. The sun never went down upon his wrath. It is he who writes, "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, an heart of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

Well, then, was it because of a lack of faith? Jesus

said, "If ye shall ask anything in my name, *believing that ye receive it*, ye shall have it." The promises of God are yea and amen. "Ask and ye *shall* receive." Here is no if or peradventure. But hopelessness claims no promise, looks for nothing and goes hungry from the feast.

Paul, however, was proverbially the apostle of faith. It is he who reminds us that we walk by faith, are justified by faith and live by faith. It is enough to say that he wrote the Eleventh of Hebrews, the roll-call of the heroes of faith.

Or was Paul's request denied because of unfaithfulness? Had he forgotten his duty? Was he standing in the marketplace with folded hands? Jesus said, "*If ye abide in me and my words abide in you*, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you."

No, Paul was no idler. His life began with the question, "What wilt thou have me to do?" And his years were passed in a self-denying spirit of consecration which gave him no rest; as he said, "The love of Christ constraineth me!"

May it have been because he was not sufficiently importunate? God loves our importunity. Jesus said, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." It is wrestling Jacob who prevails in prayer. It is the Syrophenician woman, refusing to take no for an answer, that carries away the blessing with her.

But this, again, was not the trouble with Paul. He did not "faint." That was not why he quit praying. He says he "besought the Lord thrice." Was that all? There are many who have besought the Lord thirty times thrice and have still kept on praying apparently to no avail. The reason why Paul ceased

praying was because the Lord said no; and what was the use of going on?

I have tried to eliminate every possible reason why the boon that Paul so earnestly craved was denied him. *One solution of the problem remains and only one: namely, perhaps his prayer was answered.*

And indeed it was. In the story of this strange experience you will not find a word of complaint or an intimation that his prayer was unheard or that his request was not granted in the best possible way.

To be sure, it was not in his way. Where will you find any promise that the Lord will answer in our way? Why should he? Paul himself says, "We know not what to pray for as we ought." Shakespeare says, "We, ignorant of ourselves, beg often our own harms, which the wise powers deny us for our good." A child may cry for a white powder that looks like sugar; but the mother, who knows it to be arsenic, would be neither wise nor kind to give it.

But, if our prayers are not always granted in our way, we may be confident that they are granted in the best way. We always get what we ask or something better. We pray for wealth; shall we complain if we are made "rich toward God"? We plead for health; but if such prayers were always answered, heaven would be indefinitely deferred, since none would die. In the superior wisdom of God it may appear that temporal gifts are not for our good; but spiritual gifts are never denied us.

If one seeming boon is refused it is only that a better may be given us. We ask for a stone and get bread, but never *vice versa*. God's promise is Yea

and amen; and it is always full-filled, heaped up and running over. Would you have it any other way?

Are we always sure that we really want what we ask for? In the biography of St. Francis Borgia it is related that his wife being mortally ill,—~~whom he loved as the apple of his eye~~—he wrestled all night long in prayer that God would heal her. At daybreak he heard a Voice saying, "My servant, thou shalt have thy desire if thou sayest so; but this would be calamitous for thee and her. Shall I still grant it?" What could he say? What would you have said? There was nothing to say but, "Lord, have ~~thy way~~ ^{thine} ~~with me.~~ ^{over way!}"

So it was with Paul. He realized that his prayer was answered and in the best way. The thorn remained but grace was given him to bear it. And in this he was not only content but ^{gladly} joyously acquiescent. Hear him: "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong. Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me!"

The secret of prayer is to be learned at the gate of Gethsemane; where we observe a singular parallel to the case of Paul. Let us stand in the shadow of the olive trees and listen to Jesus as the purple cup of death was pressed to his lips. "He fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!' And again he prayed the second time, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.' And again he prayed saying the same words, 'If it be possible let this cup pass from me!'" But in this case he added, "If it be not possible, thy will

be done!" Was that prayer denied? Oh, no! The great answer was given him: for in the drinking of that cup he was destined to see the travail of his soul and be satisfied. The gates of heaven are thronged with sinners saved by his grace and praising him because he drank it.

Now listen to the beloved John; "This is the confidence that we have in him; that if we ask anything according to his will he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." So then we are to ask with a due reference to the divine will; and to keep ourselves in harmony with God's beneficent purpose concerning us, in which "all things work together for good to them that love him." For nothing is truer than this:

"Ill that God blesses is our good,
And unblessed good is ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be his dear will."

Shall we say that it ^{is} ~~savours~~ of fatalism, thus to ^{be a defect} ~~defer to the~~ sovereign wisdom? Or that it puts ^{an} ~~an~~ ^{unnatural} ~~estoppel~~ on prayer to assume that God has a definite plan for us?

Do children stop asking for things because their parents sometimes refuse, knowing what is best for them? ^{Yes, children} Nay, the little people are not so foolish. They keep on asking and they keep on receiving, too.

Thus prayer "moves the hand that moves the world," and always moves it for our good. The answer never fails when we pray aright; and we cannot fail to pray aright when we keep right with God.

XXII

PAUL ON HIS KNEES

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man: that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."—EPH. 3: 14-19.

IF ever a man had "the gift of the knees" it was Paul. He began his Christian life with a prayer, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" That was thirty years before our text; and he had been praying ever since.

He was now a prisoner in the Pretorian Camp at Rome. No more missionary journeys for him; no more sermons on Mars Hill or in Solomon's Porch or at the corners of the streets. Old and weary with oft infirmities he was apparently disabled for service. Disabled? Not he! "Love laughs at locksmiths." This man had in his bosom a galvanic battery which was constantly sending up wireless messages to Heaven for his friends near and far.

A man of prayer is a man of power; and his power radiates in invisible streams of power for other men.

In our text we have one of Paul's wonderful pray-

ers: in which he intercedes for his Christian friends in Ephesus. *And the burden of his prayer is for power.* To the young minister of the Ephesian Church he had written once and again, "Be strong"; and to the members of the flock, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

He was not thinking of physical or intellectual strength, but of the spiritual strength which enables a man "to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand." This is what he means by being strengthened "in the inner man."

Paul never thinks of himself as one man but always as two. Thus he says, "Though our outward man perish yet the inward man is renewed day by day." While the outward man is fainting with the cry, "What shall I eat and what shall I drink and wherewith shall I be clothed?" the inward man is growing stronger in the graces that make for character and influence and everlasting life.

So it was with the prisoner in the Pretorian Camp. Physically he was old and infirm, but spiritually his eyes were bright and his natural force unabated. Let him speak for himself; "I will glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; for when I am weak then I am strong!" And the strength of which Paul was conscious is what he desires for his Ephesian friends; that they, like their old pastor, may be strengthened with might by the Spirit who alone can baptize with fire and power in the inner man.

But why this earnest plea? What advantage would come to the church members of Ephesus through such a baptism of power?

Only so, says Paul, could they attain unto the full

measure of the Christian life. Without it they might be minimum Christians, living at a poor dying rate, like doves with their wings clipped; but with it they could mount into the higher air.

And just here the great apostle opens up the Three Great Mysteries of the Gospel—into which none can be initiated save those who throw their hearts open to the gift of power which God, “according to the riches of his glory,” would bestow upon all who love him.

The first of these mysteries is the indwelling of Christ: namely, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.”

There are some church members who apparently have only a speaking acquaintance with Christ. In the morning they kneel down and have a brief conversation with him, then part company for the day; and in the evening when he comes again as a formal caller, they kneel at their bedsides and have another short conversation with him. But there are other Christians who entertain him as an “indwelling” guest; and these know the true happiness of the spiritual life.

Our Lord speaks of this indwelling in the parable of the Vine and the Branches; “He that abideth in me and I in him the same beareth much fruit.” And again in his conversation with Jude, “If a man love me he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come in and make our abode with him.” And again in his sacerdotal prayer, “I in thee and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them.”

The key to this happy hospitality is faith; “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” What is

faith? It is the reaching out of the soul to appropriate the proffered gift. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock;" says Christ, "if any man will open unto me I will come in and sup with him and he with me." Faith is the hand that draws the bolt to let him in. "According to your faith be it unto you."

It will not answer to leave him on the threshold. "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord!" Come in and spread for us the feast of fat things and wine upon the lees; bread of life, apples and pomegranates from the royal orchards and water from the King's wells! Come in and take possession of every room and closet of our lives! Come in and sup with us!

The second of the mysteries is the knowing of the unknowable love; "that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

It is surmised that Paul is here intimating a comparison with the great temple of Diana, under whose shadow these Christians of Ephesus were living. Its dimensions were familiar; four hundred and twenty feet long; two hundred feet wide; and seventy feet in height. They could walk about that temple and measure it with ease; but who among them could measure the love of Christ? It is long as eternity and wide as the universe, high as the heaven from which he came on his errand of mercy, and deep as the hell from which he has saved us.

"Could we with ink the ocean fill;
Were the whole world of parchment made;
Were every several stick a quill;
And every man a scribe by trade;

To write the love of Christ alone
Would drain that ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky."

And the key of this mystery is love; "that ye being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend it." No objective analysis will answer here. We know about light not by reading Tyndall's essays, but by lifting our eyes to the sun as he cometh forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber. We know about heat not by studying calorics, but by warming our hands at the fire. A man may be familiar with the chemistry of water and yet die for want of a cup of it.

A letter comes to me from an old-fashioned friend, written in stilted phrases and a cramped hand. You read it and smile; there's nothing there for you. Ah, but she's not your mother. Give me the letter, now; how it warms my heart and bedews my eyes! Love only can comprehend love. God's goodness is Sanscrit to any but his children. If you would understand, you must yourself be "rooted" in it like a tree drawing its life from a fountain beneath the hills; and "grounded" on it like a temple on a rock. So it comes to pass that the love of Christ which is otherwise unknowable is known and comprehended by those who love him.

The third of the Mysteries is the full-filling of the fulness of God; "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

At this point I confess myself at an utter loss. What does this mean, to "be filled with all the fulness of God?" How can the finite contain the infinite? How can a human heart hold the divine plenitude?

I find one commentator saying, "It is as when a dewdrop shines and sparkles, up to the full measure of its capacity, with the glory of the sun": and another "It is like a child dipping a gourd into the sea; the gourd, according to its measure, holds the fulness of the sea." But such explanations do not explain. The best we can say is "I do not know," and leave the solution of this mystery to the brighter day.

Its key is held in reserve among the great surprises that await us when we reach the Kingdom. "In that day ye shall know." Meanwhile let us rest in this assurance, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

"There are depths of love that we cannot know
Till we cross the narrow sea;
There are heights of joy that we may not reach
Till we rest, O Lord, in thee."

But here is the practical question; Do we want the spiritual strength that enables the soul to mount up as on eagle's wings and kindle its eyes at these sublime verities as at the noon day sun?

It goes without saying that one who is not a Christian has no such aspiration. He has not even begun to run up the heavenly way. His concern is for the welfare of the outer man. At his heart stands Christ the life giver, an unwelcome guest, with the door closed against him. What hope is there for such a man? His contentment on the lower levels shuts out all possible dreams and visions of better things further on.

But what about those who profess to be Christians? Are they willing to receive this power "according to

the riches of his glory?" Oh, to be willing in the day of his power! We are just as good Christians as we want to be. I am glad the Lord did not say, "Blessed are they that are satisfied," but "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst; for they shall be filled." Where there is no hunger or thirst there is no promise of the bread and water of life.

If we fall short of our highest privilege it is not because of any reluctance on God's part. He is willing to bless the willing even unto the uttermost. Large prayers honour his beneficence. "Open your mouths wide," he says, "and I will fill them."

It is related by Mr. Moody that, after having his name on the church roster for more than twenty years, he became convinced that there was something beyond, a glorious measure of ability and usefulness to which he had not attained; and for this he began to pray. One night, immediately following the Chicago fire, he walked the streets pleading for the gift of the Holy Ghost and power. At a late hour he retired to his room and fell upon his knees resolved that there should be no more reservation; that the last bolt should be drawn and the door thrown wide to the waiting Christ. Then the blessing came—came so plentifully that he found himself walking up and down his room crying, "O Lord, stay now thy hand! No more, no more!" Then and there he received the baptism which enabled him to win souls to Christ as doves flocking to their windows.

Oh, for this willingness to be strong; this consuming desire to be our noblest and do our best in return for the unreserved love of the Saviour who gave himself for us!

The day came when Paul was led out along the way towards Ostia to his execution. There were priests and beggars and Arab merchants and camel-drivers who turned to look at the procession as it passed. This was what they saw: an armed guard with a Jewish culprit in chains; an old man of "mean presence" who was destined to walk through history with a commanding stride. The place was reached: there was the flash of a heavy sword; a head fell from the block. "There's an end of this zealot," said the executioner to his men.

Little they knew! The outward man had perished, but the inward man still lives and renews his strength along the centuries. He walks up and down in our Church councils, with a determining voice in all theological controversies until the end of time. Thus Paul's death was but the widening of his parish.

" Out of sight sinks the stone
In the deep sea of time;
But the circles sweep on."

If we care for an abiding influence like that let us make no reservation, as of doors ajar, in our welcome to the waiting Christ; but bid him come in and sup with us. And while at the feast let us lift our hearts like chalices to be filled with his inflowing grace.

So shall Christ dwell in our hearts by faith; so shall we, being rooted and grounded in love, be able to comprehend the love unknowable; so shall we move on from grace to grace and from glory to glory until, in the clearer light of heaven, we shall understand what this means, to be "filled with all the fulness of God!"

XXIII

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

"That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."—EPH: 3: 18.

OUR text is a part of Paul's wonderful prayer for the church members of Ephesus: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith: that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge; that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Here are three paradoxes in a row.

The first is theological; "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Grasp that, if you can: the finite filled with all the fulness of the infinite!

The second is rhetorical; "that ye might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." This would appear to be the limit of hyperbole; for how can one know the unknowable?

The third is mathematical, "that ye might be able to

comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height of it."

In this case the difficulty lies in the fact that four dimensions are given while we are acquainted with only three. A line has one dimension; namely, length. A surface has two; length and breadth. A space, like a box or a room, has three; length, breadth, and depth or thickness. This completes all measurement, so far as our knowledge goes.

A man on shipboard gets his bearings from time to time, first by taking his latitude, second by taking his longitude and third by dropping the lead. If the plummet could go clear through to the other side he would find the diameter of the world and so make a complete measurement of it.

A good deal has been said of late with reference to a fourth dimension; but nobody seems to know anything about it. There are scientists who insist upon its actuality; but when cornered they cannot even define it. Here, however, we have it. The Apostle in his prayer is measuring the divine Love as manifest in grace. It stands before him like a temple; but, unlike other temples, four dimensions are needed to describe it.

First, as to its Length; or shall we say, its longitude. We are now sailing north. How far must we go to reach the furthest limit of the grace of God?

In the provisions of the Gospel it is announced that God is able to save "unto the uttermost." There is blood enough in the fountain drawn from Immanuel's veins to save every one of the sixteen hundred millions of the world's inhabitants even to the last man. The fact that twelve hundred millions are

still unsaved is our fault, not his. He "tasted death for every man," and "whosoever will" is invited to partake of all the benefits of the cross.

The quantum of sin in any individual case presents no obstacle to the scope of divine grace. "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow." The deeper the scarlet the more sovereign the cure. "Where sin hath abounded grace hath much more abounded." Drabs and drunkards who accept the overture of mercy enter heaven before self-righteous hypocrites who reject it.

Second, as to its Breadth; or, so to speak, its latitude. Now we are sailing west. What is this that is written; "As far as the East is from the West, so far have I removed your transgressions from you."

How far is the East from the West? Set out from San Francisco and see. Pass Honolulu and the Philippines, on through the Straits of Malacca; whither now? Westward ho! On through the Gulf of Aden, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean; out into the broad Atlantic, through the Panama Canal, always Westward, till we sail again through the Golden Gate. Where then is the West? There is none! So there is no limit to pardoning grace. We sing,

"There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea."

But the measureless sweep of grace cannot be likened to the wideness of the sea. A child standing on the beach and shading its eyes in vain might speak of "the boundless deep." We know, however, by faith, which is "the evidence of things not seen," that the sea has a further shore. But there

is no distant shore whereon our exiled sins can find a landing place. They are wanderers in Oblivion. They are cast behind the back of God, so that he will "remember them no more against us."

On the great Day of Atonement when the High Priest came from the Holy of Holies, whither he had gone to make atonement for the nation, he found a scapegoat awaiting him. On its devoted head he laid his hands, red with sacrificial blood, and "pressed hard" as the rabbis say, to indicate the transfer of the heavy burden of the people's sins. So do we approach our Saviour, saying,

"My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine,
While, like a penitent, I stand
And thus confess my sin."

And after that the scapegoat was sent away "by the hand of a fit man, into the land of Azazel." Where was Azazel? No one knows. Over the hills went the scapegoat to Nomansland, into the mysterious West, with its burden of sin. So vast is the latitude of grace. So immeasurable is the love that redeems us!

Third, as to its Depth. Now let the plummet fall! How far did Christ come down to save us? Listen to this: "He, being in the form of God, counted not his equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men: and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross."

A man is sometimes found—but rarely, thank God,

in the church of these enlightened days—who says “I do not believe in Foreign Missions.” What has he to say of this far missionary journey of the only-begotten Son of God? Out of “the glory which he had with the Father before the world was” he came—laying aside his crown and sceptre,—down, down, down into the very slums of this sin-stricken world to redeem us. Drop the lead a million fathoms and you shall not sound the depths of this humiliation.

If the sun were suddenly to descend at high noon and assume the proportions of a glow-worm, it would not parallel the miracle of the manger, “Great is the mystery of godliness; God manifest in flesh, the angels desire to look into it.”

But the plummet goes deeper yet. Not only did Christ come down to earth in our behalf: “he descended into hell,” that he might bear the utmost penalty of our sin.

As he entered the Garden of Gethsemane he said to the disciples who were with him, “Tarry ye here, while I go yonder.” All alone he passed into the darker shadow to put the purple cup to his lips. Not even the chosen three could help him drink it. For thus it was written, “I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me.”

All alone he climbed up Via Dolorosa, while his great heart was breaking under the burden of the world's sin. Hear him now as, hung up betwixt heaven and earth, he cries, *Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani!* No darkest night was ever pierced by a cry like that; “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!” Then and there did he descend into hell for us! Into that lowest depth he carried our burden and left it

there, "that we might be accepted of God and never be forsaken of him."

For this reason we are able to say, "There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." And here rings out the great challenge: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth! Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

And now we come to the *fourth* dimension. We have sought to estimate the breadth and length and depth of redeeming grace; but what shall be said of its height? "It is high as heaven; I cannot attain unto it."

How high are the heavens? The nearest of the fixed stars, in the constellation of The Centaur, is 200,000 times as far away as the sun. Alpha in Auriga is 4,000,000 times as far; and beyond lies infinite space, thick-set with shining orbs. Gaze through the interstellar spaces long and earnestly as you will, there are always more beyond, wheeling into view like battalions speeding to the battle front. There is no limit to the beyond! So is the altitude of divine grace.

It is vast as the ether; near as the air we breathe; immeasurable as the pathway to the throne.

This is the fourth dimension which baffles thought. God's name is the Most High. He is "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity." Are we bewildered by the mere effort of contemplating him? So be it. He speaks, "Be still and know that I am God!"

Yet "though the Lord be high, he hath respect unto to the lowly." In the Gospel of his grace he lifts us out of the deepest depths of sin to labour together with him here and be glorified forever with him. In Christ we not only regain our lost birthright, but more. His Cross bridges the infinite chasm that separates the sinner from eternal communion with a holy God.

"His love, what mortal thought can reach,
What mortal tongue display?
Imagination's utmost stretch
In wonder dies away."

How vain all measurements! We have attempted the impossible; nothing less than to compass, with our poor quadrants and calipers, the heart of the Infinite. Yet in the bosom of Christ that heart is "touched with a feeling of our infirmities." It defies mathematics, but it yields to the feeblest cry of the least of his little ones. I cannot know its breadth or its length or its depth or its height; but, kneeling in the trysting place, I can feel that heart beating against mine; and, behold, I am "as one whom his mother comforteth."

I have seen in many a humble home the picture of a "Burning Heart" under the shadow of a cross. This is the setting forth of the love that passeth

knowledge. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." The love of God and the life of man are both in that little, immeasurable "so."

"It passeth knowledge, that dear love of thine!
My Jesus! Saviour! Yet this soul of mine
Would of that love, in all its depth and length,
Its height and breadth, and everlasting strength,
Know more and more.

"It passeth praises, that dear love of Thine!
My Jesus! Saviour! Yet this heart of mine
Would sing a love so rich, so full, so free,
Which brought an undone sinner, such as me,
Right home to God."

What shall be rendered unto him for all this? Let David answer; "I will take of the cup of thy salvation and call upon thy name." None but an ingrate would do less. Love for love, service for sacrifice, praise forever; this is all that we can do.

"Just as I am, *thy love unknown*
Has broken every barrier down;
Now to be thine, yea thine alone.
O Lamb of God, I come!"

This is the love that "constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all die; that they who live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them."

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!

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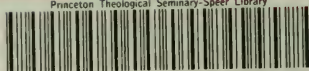
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